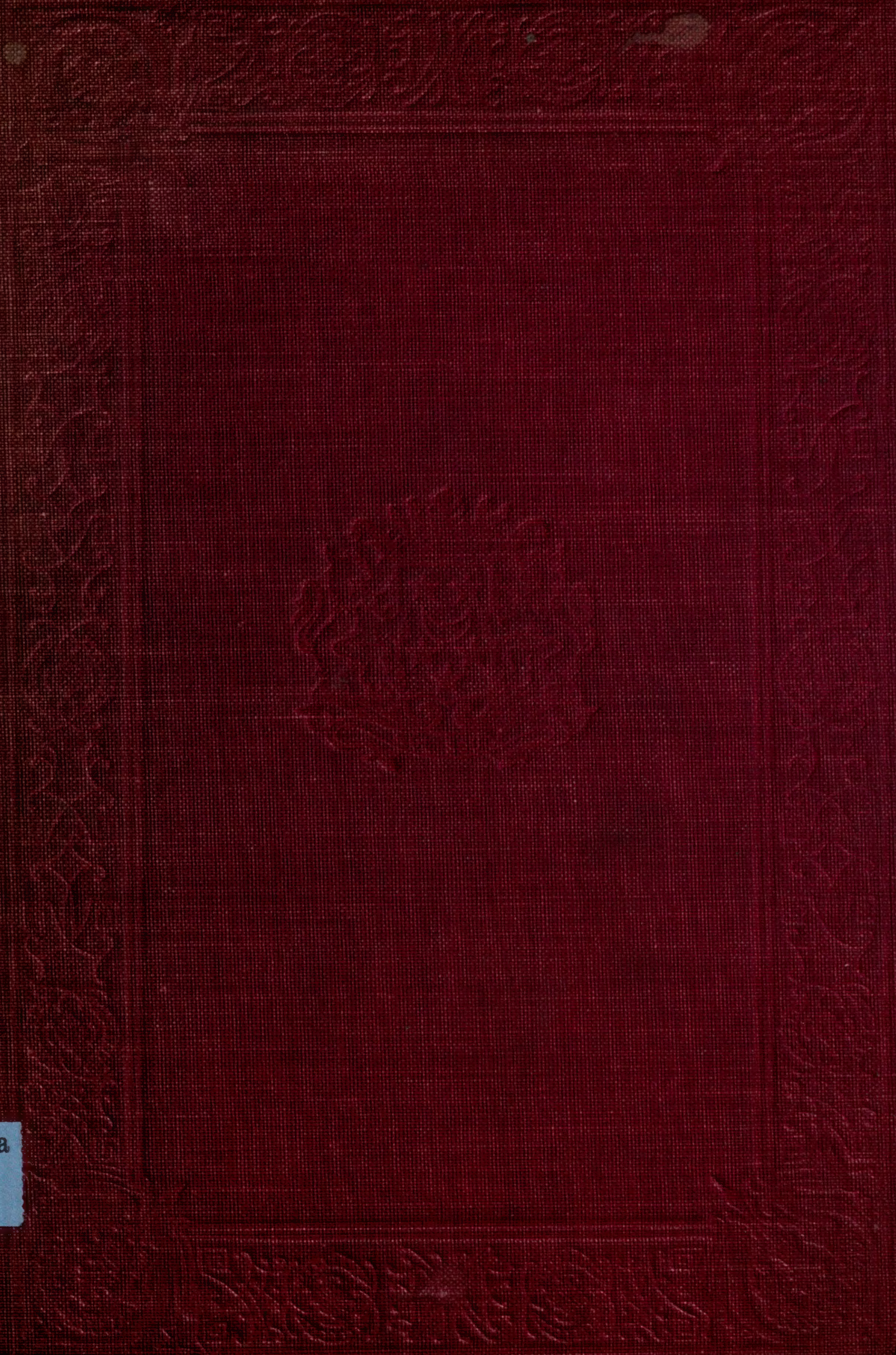

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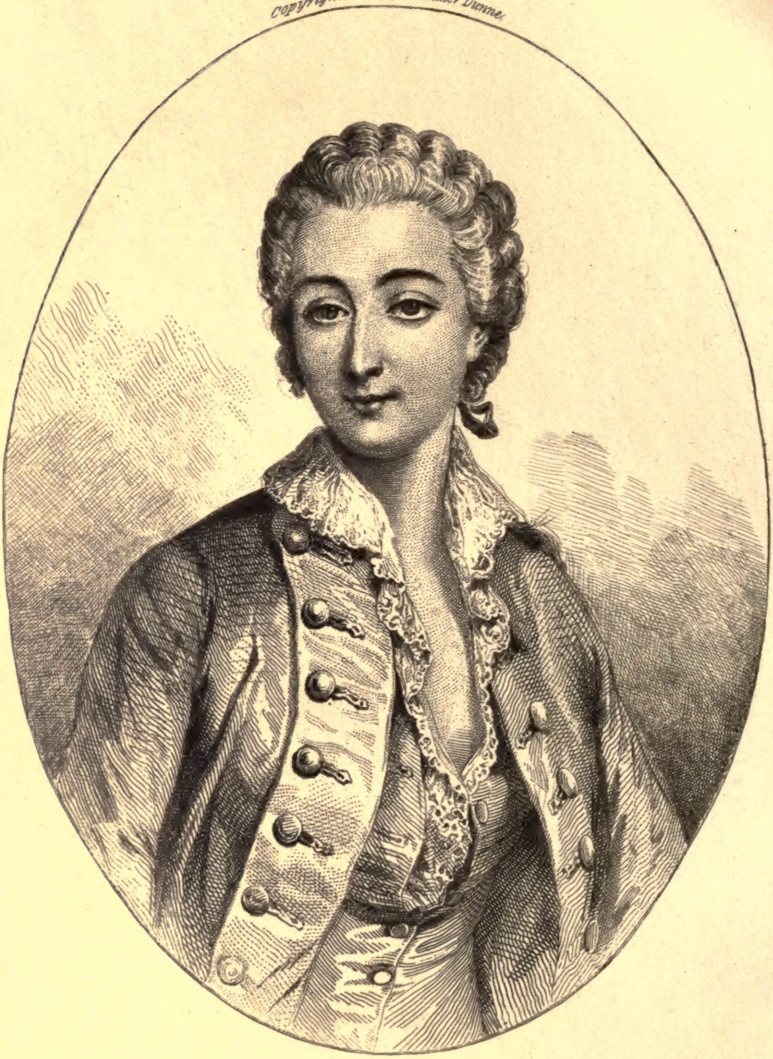

JEANNE VAUBERNIER, COMTESSE DU BARRY

From the portrait by J. J. Caffieri, 1770

MEMOIRS OF THE COMTESSE DU BARRY

WITH MINUTE DETAILS OF HER ENTIRE
CAREER AS FAVORITE OF LOUIS XV.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF

WITH A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION BY
ROBERT ARNOT, M.A.

M. WALTER DUNNE, PUBLISHER
NEW YORK & LONDON

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Jeanne Vaubernier, Comtesse du Barry . . . *Frontispiece*
From the portrait by J. J. Caffieri, 1770.

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SPECIAL INTRODUCTION

Up to the time of the Du Barry the court of France had been the stage where the whole political and human drama of that country was enacted. Under Louis XV. the drama had been transformed into parades — parades which were of as much importance to the people as to those who took part in them. The spectators, hitherto silent, now began to hiss and be moved. The scene of the comedy was changed, and the play was continued among the spectators. The old theatre became an ante-chamber or a dressing-room, and was no longer important except in connection with the Cardinal de Bernis and the Duc de Richelieu, or Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry.

The monarchy had still a step to take towards its downfall. It had already created the *Parc aux Cerfs* (Louis XV.'s seraglio), but had not yet descended to the Parisian house of prostitution. It made this descent leaning on the arm of Madame du Barry. Madame du Barry was a moral sister to Manon Lescaut, but instead of taking herself off to Louisiana to repent, she plunged into the golden whirlpool at Versailles as a finish to her career. Could the coaches of a King mean more than the ordinary carriage of an abandoned girl?

Jeanne Vaubernier — known in the bagnios by the name of Mademoiselle Lange — was born at Vaucouleurs, as was Jeanne d'Arc. Better still, this later Jeanne said openly at Versailles — dared she say otherwise? — that she was descended in a straight line from the illustrious, the venerated, the august, sacred, national maid, Jeanne.

"Why did Du Barry come to Paris?" says Leon Gozlan in that account of the Château de Lucienne which makes a brilliant and learned chapter in the history of France. « Does one ever know precisely why things are done? She obeyed the magnet which attracts to Paris all who in themselves have a title to glory, to celebrity, or to misfortune. Du Barry had a pretty, provincial face, bright and charming, a face astonished at everything, hair soft and ash-colored, blue eyes, veiled and half open, and a skin fair with rose tints. She was a child of destiny. Who could have said, when she crossed the great town in her basket cart, which rolled lazily along on its massive, creaking wheels, that some day she would have equipages more beautiful than any of those which covered her with mud in passing, and on her arms more laces and diamonds than any of these ladies attended by footmen in liveries? »

When Jeanne left the provinces to come to Paris, she found her native country. She was granted the freedom of the city, and expanded in her joy like a delicate plant transplanted into a hothouse. She found herself at home for the first time; and felt that she could rule as a despot over all frequenters of the streets. She learned fashion and love at one and the same time. Gourdan had a hat made for her, and, as a reward, initiated her into the customs. But she was called to other destinies.

One day, when she was walking in the Tuileries, a lunatic — and lunatics have second sight — asked her favor when she should become queen. Du Barry said to herself: « This man is mad. » But then she thought of the Pompadour, blushed — it was the only time — and turned her eyes towards Versailles.

But Versailles was an unhoped-for shore to such a girl as this, a girl known to all Paris. Would the King care to be the lover of one who had ruled all his courtesans? Who could say? The King often wearied of what he had. Had not a poet already been found who compared her to Venus:

O Jeanne, thy beauty seduces
And charms the whole world;
In vain does the duchess redden
And the princess growl;

They know that Venus rides proudly
The foam of the wave.

The poet, while not Voltaire, was no less a man than Boufflers.

While the King was seeking a mistress — a nocturnal reverse of Diogenes, fleeing from the lanterns of the wise — he found Jeanne Vaubernier. He thought he could love her for one evening. "Not enough," said she, "you must love me until broad daylight." So he loved her for a whole day. What should one eat in order to be loved by royalty? Was it necessary to have a coat of arms? She had them in number, because she had been loved by all the great names in the book of heraldry. And so she begged the Viscount Jean du Barry to give her the title of viscountess. "Better still," exclaimed Jean, "I will give you the title of countess. My brother will marry you; he is a male scamp, and you are the female. What a beautiful marriage!"

So they were united. The newly made countess was solemnly presented at court by a countess of ancient date, namely, the Countess de Bearn. King Voltaire protested, in a satire entitled "*The Court of King Petaud*" (topsy-turvy), afterwards denying it. The Duc de Choiseul protested, France protested, but all Versailles threw itself passionately at the feet of the new countess. Even the daughters of the King paid her court, and allowed her to call them by their pet names: Loque, Chiffe, and Graille. The King, jealous of this gracious familiarity, wished her to call him by some pet name, and so the Bacchante, who believed that through the King she held all France in her hand, called him "La France," making him a wife to his Gray Musketeers.

Oh, that happy time! Du Barry and Louis XV. hid their life — like the sage — in their little apartments. She honeyed his chocolate, and he himself made her coffee. Royalty consecrated a new verb for the dictionary of the Academy, and Madame du Barry said to the King: "At home, I can love you to madness." The King gave the castle of Lucienne to his mistress in order to be able to sing the same song. Truly the Romeo and Juliet *de la main gauche.*

Du Barry threw out her fish-wifely epithets with ineffable tenderness. She only opened her eyes half way, even when she took him by the throat. The King was enchanted by these humors. It was a new world. But someone said to him: «Ah! Sire, it is easy to see that your Majesty has never been at the house of Gourdan.»

Yet Du Barry was adored by poets and artists. She extended both hands to them. Jeanne's beauty had a penetrating, singular charm. At once she was blonde and brunette—black eyebrows and lashes with blue eyes, rebellious light hair with darker shadows, cheeks of ideal contour, whose pale rose tints were often heightened by two or three touches—a lie «formed by the hand of Love,» as anthology puts it—a nose with expressive nostrils, an air of childlike candour, and a look seductive to intoxication. A bold yet shrinking Venus, a Hebe yet a Bacchante. With much grace Voltaire says:

«MADAME:

«M. de la Borde tells me that you have ordered him to kiss me on both cheeks for you:

« That! Two kisses at life's end
What a passport to send me!
Two is one too much, Adorable Nymph;
I should die of pleasure at the first.

He showed me your portrait, and be not offended, Madame, when I tell you that I have taken the liberty of giving that the two kisses.»

Perhaps Voltaire would not have written this letter, had he not read the one written by the King to the Duc de Choiseul, who refused to pay court to the left-hand queen:

«MY COUSIN,

«The discontent which your acts cause me forces me to exile you to Chanteloup, where you will take yourself within twenty-four hours. I would have sent you farther away were it not for the particular esteem in which I hold Madame de Choiseul. With this, I pray God, my cousin, to take you into His safe and holy protection.

«LOUIS.»

This exile was the only crime of the courtesan. On none of her enemies did she close the gates of the Bastille. And more than once did she place a pen in the hands of Louis XV. with which to sign a pardon. Sometimes, indeed, she was ironic in her compassion.

« Madame, » said M. de Sartines to her one day, « I have discovered a rogue who is scattering songs about you; what is to be done with him? »

« Sentence him to sing them for a livelihood. »

But she afterwards made the mistake of pensioning Chevalier de Morande to buy silence.

The pleasures of the King and his favorite were troubled only by the fortune-tellers. Neither the King nor the countess believed in the predictions of the philosophers, but they did believe in divination. One day, returning from Choisy, Louis XV. found under a cushion of his coach a slip of paper on which was transcribed this prediction of the monk Aimonius, the savant who could read all things from the vast book of the stars:

> « As soon as Childeric had returned from
> Thuringia, he was crowned King of France
> And no sooner was he King than he espoused
> Basine, wife of the King of Thuringia.
> She came herself to find Childeric. The
> first night of the marriage, and before the King
> had retired, the queen begged Childeric to look
> from one of the palace windows which opened on a
> park, and tell what he saw there. Childeric
> looked out and, much terrified, reported to the
> princess that he had seen tigers and lions.
> Basine sent him a second time to look out.
> This time the prince only saw bears and wolves,
> and the third time he perceived only cats and dogs,
> fighting and combating each other. Then Basine
> said to him: I will give you an explanation of what
> you have seen: The first figure shows you your
> successors, who will excel you in courage and power;
> the second represents another race which will be
> illustrious for their conquests, and which will augment
> your kingdom for many centuries; but the third denotes
> the end of your kingdom, which will be given over to pleasures
> and will lose to you the friendship of your subjects;
> and this because the little animals signify a people who,
> emancipated from fear of princes, will massacre them and then
> make war upon each other. »

Louis read the prediction and passed the paper to the Countess: « After us the end of the world,» said she gaily. The King laughed, but the Abbé de Beauvais celebrated high mass at Versailles after the carnival of 1774, and dared to say, in righteous anger: «This carnival is the last; yet forty days and Nineveh shall perish.» Louis turned pale. «Is it God who speaks thus?» murmured he, raising his eyes to the altar. The next day he went to the hunt in grand style, but from that evening he was afraid of solitude and silence: «It is like the tomb; I do not wish to put myself in such a place,» said he to Madame du Barry. The Duc de Richelieu tried to divert him. «No,» said he suddenly, as if the Trappist's denunciation had again recurred to him, «I shall be at ease only when these forty days have passed.» He died on the fortieth day.

Du Barry believed neither in God nor in the devil, but she believed in the almanac of Liège. She scarcely read any book but this — faithful to her earliest habits. And the almanac of Liège, in its prediction for April, 1774, said: «A woman, the greatest of favorites, will play her last rôle.» So Madame the Countess du Barry said without ceasing: «I shall not be tranquil until these forty days have passed.» The thirty-seventh day the King went to the hunt attended with all the respect due to his rank. Jeanne wept in silence and prayed to God as one who has long neglected her prayers.

Louis XV. had not neglected his prayers, and gave two hundred thousand livres to the poor, besides ordering masses at St. Geneviève. Parliament opened the shrine, and knelt gravely before that miraculous relic. The least serious of all these good worshippers was, strange to say, the curate of St. Geneviève: «Ah, well!» said he gaily, when Louis was dead, «let us continue to talk of the miracles of St. Geneviève. Of what can you complain? Is not the King dead?»

At the last moment it was not God who held the heart of Louis — it was his mistress. «Ask the Countess to come here again,» he said.

« Sire, you know that she has gone away,» they answered.

« Ah! has she gone? Then I must go! » So he departed.

His end drew forth some maledictions. There were insults even at his funeral services. « Nevertheless, » said one old soldier, « he was at the battle of Fontenoy. » That was the most eloquent funeral oration of Louis XV.

« The King is dead, long live the King! » But before the death of Louis XVI. they cried: « The king is dead, long live the Republic! »

Rose-colored mourning was worn in the good city of Paris. The funeral oration of the King and a lament for his mistress were pronounced by Sophie Arnould, of which masterpiece of sacred eloquence the last words only are preserved: « Behold us orphaned both of father and mother. »

If Madame du Barry was one of the seven plagues of royalty, she died faithful to royalty. After her exile to Pont aux Dames she returned to Lucienne, where the Duc de Cossé Brissac consoled her for the death of Louis XV. But what she loved in Louis was that he was a King; her true country was Versailles; her true light was the sun of court life. Like Montespan, also a courtesan of high order, she often went in these dark days to cast a loving look upon the solitary park in the maze of the Trianon. Yet she was particularly happy at Lucienne.

I have compared her to Manon Lescaut, and I believe her to have been also a sister to Ganesin. All three were destroyed by passion.

One day she found herself still young at Lucienne, although her sun was setting. She loved the Duc de Brissac, and how many pages of her past romance would she that day have liked to erase and forget!

« Why do you weep, Countess? » asked her lover.

« My friend, » she responded, « I weep because I love you, shall I say it? I weep because I am happy. »

She was right; happiness is a festival that should know no to-morrow. But on the morrow of her happiness, the Revolution knocked at the castle gate of Lucienne.

« Who goes there? »

"I am Justice; prepare for destiny."

The Queen, the true queen, had been good to her as to everybody. Marie Antoinette remembered that the favorite had not been wicked. The debts of Du Barry were paid and money enough was given to her so that she could still give with both hands. Lucienne became an echo of Versailles. Foreign kings and Parisian philosophers came to chat in its portals. Minerva visited shameless Venus. But wisdom took not root at Lucienne.

For the Revolution, alas! had to cut off this charming head, which was at one time the ideal of beauty — of court beauty. Madame du Barry gave hospitality to the wounded at the arrest of the queen. "These wounded youths have no other regret than that they have not died for a princess so worthy as your Majesty," she said. "What I have done for these brave men is only what they have merited. I consoled them, and I respect their wounds when I think, Madame, that without their devotion, your Majesty would no longer be alive. Lucienne is yours, Madame, for was it not your beneficence which gave it to me? All I possess has come to me through the royal family. I have too much loyalty to forget it."

But negro Zamor became a citizen like Mirabeau. It was Zamor who took to Du Barry her lover's head. It was Zamor who denounced her at the club of the Jacobins. "The fealty (faith) of the black man is white," said the negro. But he learned how to make it red. Jeanne was imprisoned and tried before Dumas.

"Your age?"

"Forty-two years." She was really forty-seven. Coquetry even at the guillotine.

The public accuser, Fouquier Tinville, was not disarmed by the sweet voluptuousness still possessed by this pale and already fading beauty. He accused her of treason against the nation. Could the defender of Du Barry, who had also defended Marie Antoinette, find an eloquent word? No; Fouquier Tinville was more eloquent than Chauveau-Lagarde. So the mistress of Louis was condemned. It was eleven o'clock in the evening — the hour for supper at Versailles when she was queen!

She passed the night in prayer and weeping, or rather in a frenzy of fright. In the morning she said it was « too early to die»; she wished to have a little time in order to make some disclosures. The Comité sent someone to listen to her. What did she say? She revealed all that was hidden away at Lucienne; she gave word by word an inventory of the treasures she had concealed, forgetting nothing, for did not each word give her a second of time?

« Have you finished? » said the inquisitor. « No, » said Jeanne. « I have not mentioned a silver syringe concealed under the staircase! »

Meanwhile the horses of destiny stamped with impatience, and spectators were knocking at the prison gate. When they put her, already half dead, on the little cart, she bent her head and grew pale. The Du Barry was alone — a sinner without redemption.

She saw the people in the square of Louis XV.; she struck her breast three times and murmured: « It is my fault! » But this Christian resignation abandoned her when she mounted the scaffold — there where the statue of Louis XV. had been — and she implored of the executioner: « One moment, Mr. Executioner! One moment more! »

But the executioner was pitiless Sanson. It was the block and the knife — without the « one moment! »

Such was the last bed of the Du Barry. Had the almanac of Liège only predicted to her that the one who would lead her to her bed for the last time would not be a King but a citizen executioner, it might have been — but why moralize?

Robert Arnot

To the Reader

As the early part of Madame du Barry's career had little to differentiate it from the life of an ordinary courtezan, the editor has deemed it best to confine the memoirs to the years in her life which helped to make history.

—*EDITOR.*

CHAPTER I.

Letter from Lebel—Visit from Lebel—Nothing conclusive—Another visit from Lebel—Invitation to sup with the king—Instructions of the comte Jean to the comtesse.

ONE morning comte Jean entered my apartment, his face beaming with delight.

"Read," said he, giving me a letter, "read, Jeannette: victory is ours. News from Morand. Lebel is coming to Paris, and will dine with us. Are we alone?"

"No, there are two of your countrymen whom you invited yesterday."

"I will write and put them off. Morand alone must dine with Lebel; he ought to have a place at the feast which he furnishes with such good music. Come, my dear girl, we touch the moment of importance, it is in your beauty and power of pleasing that I place all my hopes. I think I may rely on you; but, above all, do not forget that you are my sister-in-law."

"Brother-in-law," said I, laughing, "it is not unnecessary that I should know decidedly to which of your family I am married? The custom in France is not that a woman be the undivided property of three brothers."

"That only happens in Venice," replied the comte; "my brother Elie is too young, you must be the wife of Guillaume, my second brother."

"Very well; I am the comtesse Guillaume du Barry; that does famously well; we like to know whom we are married to."

After this conversation, comte Jean insisted on presiding at my toilette. He acquitted himself of the task, with a most laughable attention. During two good hours, at least, he tormented first Henriette, and then the female hairdresser, for I had not yet followed the mode, which began to be very general, of having my hair dressed by a man. Comte Jean passed alternately from my dressing-room to the kitchen. He knew Lebel was a gallant and a gourmand, and he was anxious to please him in all senses at once.

At one o'clock I was under arms, and prepared to receive him on whom my destiny depended. As soon as I reached the drawing-room, comte Jean compelled me to submit to the test of a rigid examination. His serious air amused me much as he gazed at me some time in solemn silence. At length his forehead relaxed, a smile of satisfaction played on his lips, and extending his arms to me, without venturing to touch me, « You are charming, divine,» he said; « Lebel ought to go and hang himself if he does not fall down at your knees.»

Soon afterwards the folding-doors were hastily opened, and a servant announced M. Lebel, *premier de sa Majesté*, with M. Morand. The comte went to meet the arrivals, and as I now saw Lebel for the first time, he presented him to me formally.

« Sister, this is M. Lebel, *premier de sa Majesté*, who has done us the honor to come and dine with us.»

« And he confers a real pleasure on us,» said I, looking smilingly on M. Lebel. My look had its effect, for Lebel remained mute and motionless from admiration at my person. At length he stammered out a few incoherent words, which I imagined to be compliments. The comte watched Lebel anxiously, and Morand began to rub his hands, saying:

« Well, sir, what think you of our celestial beauty?»

« She is worthy of a throne,» replied Lebel, bending his head before me, and taking my hand, which he pressed respectfully to his lips. This reply was, perhaps, inadvertently made, but I took it as a good augury. « Yes,» added Lebel, « you are the most lovely creature I ever met, though no one is more in the habit of seeing handsome females than myself.»

« And of causing them to be seen by others,» replied comte Jean.

This was an opening which was not followed up by Lebel. His first enthusiasm having passed, he measured me from head to foot, as if he would take an accurate description of my person.

For my part I began to support the looks of Lebel with more assurance. He was a man of no particular "mark or likelihood," but had made his way. Living at Versailles had given him a certain air of easy impertinence, but you could not discover anything distinguished in his manners, nothing which concealed his humble extraction. The direction of the *Parc aux Cerfs* gave him much influence with the king, who found the convenience of such a man, who was willing to take upon himself all the disagreeable part of his clandestine amours. His duties placed him in contact with the ministers, the lieutenant of police, and the comptroller-general. The highest nobility sought his friendship with avidity. They all had a wife, a sister, a daughter, whom they wished to make the favorite sultana; and for this it was necessary to get the ear of Lebel. Thus, under a libertine prince, the destinies of France were at the mercy of a *valet de chambre.*

I should tell you, however, that I never had occasion but to speak well of him, and that I have the utmost gratitude for all he did for me. The attachment he testified on our first meeting has never been altered. He gave me his protection as far as it was necessary for me, and when the favor of the king had accorded to me a station, whence all the court sought to hurl me, Lebel seconded me with all his power in my efforts to preserve it. I will say, that it is to his vigilance that I owe the overthrow of more than one conspiracy against me. He was a warm and sincere friend, and not at all interested in the services he rendered. He did a great deal of good, as well as harm, in private. I know poor families whom he has assisted with his own purse, when he could obtain nothing for them from the king, for Louis was only prodigal in his pleasures.

However, we dined, and Lebel praised me incessantly to the very skies, and that with so much warmth, that I was fearful at one time he would fall in love with me himself, and would not resign me to another. Thank heaven, Lebel was a faithful servant.

After dinner, when we left the table, Lebel paid me some compliments; then pulling out his watch, he spoke of an appointment at the Marais, and left without saying a word of seeing us again.

At this abrupt departure, comte Jean and I looked at each other with astonishment. As for Morand, he was overjoyed.

« Well, comtesse,» said he, « behold the number of your slaves increased by an illustrious adorer. You have made a conquest of M. Lebel, and I am certain he has gone away deeply smitten.»

« I hope we shall see him again,» said comte Jean.

« Do you doubt it ? »

« Assure him,» said I, « of the pleasure it will afford us to receive him as he merits.»

Several persons entered, and M. Morand, profiting by the bustle which their entrance occasioned, approached me, and said, in a low tone,

« You are in possession of his heart, will you charge me with any message to him? »

« M. Morand,» was my reply, « what are you thinking of ? A woman of my rank throw herself at any person's head ? »

« No, certainly not; but you can send him a kind word, or some affectionate token.»

« I could not think of it; M. Lebel appeared to me a most agreeable man, and I shall be at all times delighted to see him.»

Morand asked nothing more than this, and there our conversation ended.

Two days elapsed without being marked by any event. Comte Jean had spent them with much anxiety. He was absent, when, on the third morning, Henriette came hastily into my room. « Madame,» she said, « the *valet de chambre* of the king is in the drawing-room, and inquires if you will receive him.»

At this news I was surprised and vexed. M. Lebel took me unawares; my toilette was not begun. I gave a hasty glance at my mirror, « Let M. Lebel come in »; and M. Lebel, who was on the heels of my maid, entered instantly. After having saluted me, he said,

« It is only you, Madame, whom one might thus surprise. Your beauty needs no ornament, your charms are decoration sufficient. »

I replied to this compliment with (of course) much modesty, according to custom. We entered into conversation, and I found that Lebel really thought me the sister-in-law of comte Jean; and I remarked the involuntary respect that attended even his familiarity. I left him in his error, which was material to my interests. He talked to me some time of my attractions, of the part which a female like myself might assume in France. But fearing to compromise myself, I made no reply, but preserved the reserve which my character imposed upon me. I am not clever, my friend, I never could conduct an intrigue: I feared to speak or do wrong; and whilst I kept a tranquil appearance, I was internally agitated at the absence of comte Jean.

Fortune sent him to me. He was passing the street, when he saw at our door a carriage with the royal livery. Lebel always used it when his affairs did not demand a positive incognito. This equipage made him suspect a visit from Lebel, and he came in opportunely to extricate me from my embarrassment.

« Sir, » said Lebel to him, when he entered, « here is the lady whose extreme modesty refuses to listen to what I dare not thus explain to her. »

« Is it anything I may hear for her ? » said the comte, with a smiling air.

« Yes, I am the ambassador of a mighty power: you are the minister plenipotentiary of the lady, and with your leave, we will go into your private room to discuss the articles of the secret treaty which I have been charged to propose to you. What says madame ? »

« I consent to anything that may come from such an ambassador. »

Comte Jean instantly led him into another room, and when they were alone, Lebel said to him, « Do you know that your sister-in-law is a most fascinating creature? She has occupied my thoughts since I have known her, and in my enthusiasm I could not help speaking of her in a certain quarter. So highly have I eulogized her, that his majesty desires an interview with her, that he may judge with his own eyes if I am an appreciator of beauty."

At these words comte Jean felt a momentary agitation, but soon recovering himself, he replied:

"I am exceedingly obliged to you, sir, for the favorable disposition you have evinced towards the comtesse du Barry. She and I have as much respect as love for his majesty; but my sister-in-law has not been presented, and, consequently, I can scarcely see how she can be allowed to pay her respects to his majesty."

"Do not let that disturb you; it is not intended that she shall go and partake of the magnificence of Versailles, but be admitted to an intimacy much more flattering. Would you refuse to grant him that pleasure?"

"It would be a crime of *lèse-majesté*," said the comte Jean, laughing, "and my family have too much respect for their monarch. We should not be content with a fugitive favor."

"You may expect everything from the charms of the comtesse; I am certain they will have the utmost success; but for me, I can give you no guarantee. You must run the chance."

"Your protection, however, is the only thing which encourages my sister-in-law in this affair. But tell me when is this meeting to take place?"

"Instantly. The king is impatient to see the comtesse, and I have promised that she will sup with him to-morrow evening in my apartment at Versailles."

"How is she to be introduced to the king?"

"I am to entertain four of my friends."

"Who are they?"

"First, the baron de Gonesse."

"Who is he?"

"The king himself."

"Well, who next?"

« The duc de Richelieu. »

« Who else ? »

« The marquis de Chauvelin. »

« Well ? »

« The duc de la Vauguyon. »

« What, the devotee ? »

« The hypocrite. But never mind: the main point is, that you must not appear to recognize the king. Instruct your sister-in-law to this effect. »

« Certainly; if she must sin, she had better do so with some reason. »

While these gentlemen were thus disposing of me, what was I doing? Alone, in my room, I waited the result of their conference with mortal impatience. The character I had to play was a superb one, and at the moment I was about to enter on the stage, I felt all the difficulties of my part. I feared I should not succeed, but fail amid the insulting hisses of the Versailles party.

My fears at once disappeared, and then I pictured myself sitting on a throne, magnificently attired; my imagination wandered in all the enchantments of greatness;—then, as if from remorse, I recalled my past life. The former lover of Nicholas blushed before the future mistress of Louis XV. A thousand different reflections crowded upon me, and mingled in my brain. If to live is to think, I lived a whole age in one quarter of an hour. At length I heard some doors open, a carriage rolled away, and comte Jean entered my chamber.

« Victory! » cried he, embracing me with transport. « Victory! my dear Jeanne, to-morrow you sup with the king. »

On this information I turned pale, my strength forsook me, and I was compelled to sit down, or rather to fall into a chair; for, according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, my legs shook under me (*flageolaient*). This, however, was the only movement of weakness which I betrayed. When I recovered a little, the comte Jean told me the conversation he had had with Lebel. I joked about the title of baron de Gonesse, and I promised to treat the king as if ignorant of his incognito. One thing only made me uneasy, and that was supping with the duc de Richelieu, who had seen me before at madame de Lagarde's; but the idea that he would not remember me gave me renewed courage.

On so important an occasion, comte Jean did not forget to repeat his instructions over again. These are nearly his words, for I think I learnt them by heart.

« Remember that it is on your first interview that your safety depends. Let him learn, through you, those utter tendernesses which have been sought for him in vain heretofore. He is like the monarch of old, who was willing to pay the half of his crown for an unknown pleasure. Lebel is wearied in seeking every week for new fruit. He is quite disposed to serve you, and will second you in the best manner. You are about to become the centre of attraction to all courtiers, and noble *courtisanes*. You must expect that they will endeavor to cry you down, because you will have carried off from them a gem to which every family has its pretensions. You must at first stand firmly before the storm, but afterward you will find all enlist themselves under your banner, who have no wife, sister, nor daughter; that is, all who have no mistress to offer to the king. You must attach these to you by place and favor: they must be first thought of, and then you must think of yourself and me, my dear girl.»

« All this is well enough,» I replied, « but as yet I am nothing.»

« *Morbleu!* to-morrow you will be everything,» cried comte Jean, with his determined energy. « But we must think about this morrow. Make haste, noble comtesse; go to all the milliners, seek what is elegant rather than what is rich. Be as lovely, pleasing, and gay as possible; this is the main point, and God will do all the rest.»

He pronounced this blasphemy in a laughing tone, and I confess I could not help joining in the laugh, and then hastened to comply with his directions.

CHAPTER II.

A slight preface — Arrival at Versailles — *La toilette* — Portrait of the king — The duc de Richelieu — The marquis de Chauvelin — The duc de la Vauguyon — Supper with the king — The first night — The following day — The curiosity of comte Jean — Presents from the king — How disposed of.

THE chances against our succeeding in our enterprise were at least a thousand to one. The sea upon which, trusting to the favorable influence of my leading star, we were about to venture, was filled with rocks and shoals which threatened the poor mariner who should direct his bark near them. In the first place, I had to dread my obscure birth, as well as the manner in which my life had been passed; and still more had I to fear the indifferent reputation of comte Jean. There was more than sufficient in all this to disturb a head far stronger than I could boast. However, thanks to my thoughtfulness, no troublesome thoughts interfered to break my rest on the night preceding a day so important to me, and I slept as tranquilly as though upon waking I had no other occupation for my time than a walk on the boulevards, or a drive to the Bois de Boulogne.

Comte Jean, however, had passed a very different night; for once, the whisperings of ambition had overcome even his natural indifference and carelessness, and tired of tossing upon a sleepless pillow, he arose at the first break of day, reproached me for slumbering so long, and allowed me neither peace nor rest till I joined him dressed for our journey. At length, we set out according to our agreement with Lebel; I was closely muffled up in my large *calèche* — the carriage rolled along till we reached Versailles, where we had for the last month engaged a lodging, which might be useful to us in all events; we alighted, and after vainly seeking a few moments' repose, proceeded on foot to Lebel, in whose apartments we were to attire ourselves in a suitable manner.

« You are welcome, » said the comte, « pray consider yourself as at home. »

« I accept your augury, » replied I, « it would be amusing enough to find that my young prophet had predicted rightly. »

« Well then, » said my conductor, laughing, « I recommend you to manage a slip on the staircase, it would be taking possession after the manner of the ancients. »

« No, no, I thank you, » answered I; « no falls if you please, they are not propitious in France. »

Whilst we were thus speaking, we were crossing a long suite of chambers, and reached the one at which we were expected. We knocked cautiously at a door, which was opened to us with equal caution. Scarcely had we entered, than Lebel came eagerly forward to receive us.

« Ah, madame! » cried he, « I began to fear you might not come, you have been looked for with an impatience—»

« Which can hardly equal mine, » interrupted I; « for you were prepared for your visitor, whilst I have yet to learn who is the friend that so kindly desires to see me. »

« It is better it should be so, » added Lebel; « do not seek either to guess or discover more, than that you will here meet with some cheerful society, friends of mine, who will sup at my house, but with whom circumstances prevent my sitting down at table. »

« How! » said I, with affected surprise, « not sup with us? »

« Even so, » replied Lebel; and then added with a laugh, « *He* and I sit down to supper together! What an idea! No! you will find that just as the guests are about to sit down at table, I shall suddenly be called out of the room, and shall only return at the close of the repast. »

All this was but of small import to me. Nevertheless, I affected to regret the unavoidable absence of Lebel. In fact, I believe that the first breath inspired at court is fraught with falsehood and deceit, entirely destructive to every feeling of natural candor.

Lebel, with the most ceremonious gallantry, conducted me to a private dressing-room, where I found several females waiting to assist me at my toilet; I abandoned myself to their cares, which were, indeed, most skilfully exercised in my behalf. They wrought wonders in my appearance, bathing me after the Eastern fashion, adorning my hair and person, till I issued from their hands blooming and beauteous as an houri.

When I returned to the room in which Lebel was expecting me, his surprise was almost overpowering.

« You are, indeed, » exclaimed he, « the new sun which is to rise upon Versailles. »

« Excellent! » cried I, laughing extravagantly, « but like the planet you are pleased to compare me with, I must reserve my splendid rising till I have obtained fresh powers from the aid of night. » *

The comte entered, and joined his congratulations upon the beauty of my appearance; all at once the hasty sound of a bell, violently pulled, was heard.

« The object of your attack approaches, » said Lebel to me, « it would be as well to reconnoitre a little. Remember, not a word of his rank, no cast down, timid looks at his sovereign power; no bending of knees, or faltering of voice. »

The advice thus given was useless. Comte Jean who bore the reputation of, at least, a man of much cool impudence, was, I am certain, more deficient than myself in courage upon the occasion, and I verily believe, asked himself several times whether he dared appear before his prince with one whom he was falsely asserting to be his sister-in-law. However these thoughts might or might not have disturbed him, we proceeded onwards till we reached the apartment where our invited friends were expecting us; and here I will, with the reader's permission, digress awhile, in order to say a few introductory

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* *Mais avant de me lever il faut que je me couche*, is the witty reply in the original, but which it is impossible to render fully and piquantly through the dilution of a translation.

words respecting the four personages with whom I had the honor of supping.

And first, Louis XVth, king of France (or as he was upon the present occasion styled the baron de Gonesse), was one of those sentimental egotists who believed he loved the whole world, his subjects, and his family; while in reality, the sole engrossing object was *self.* Gifted with many personal and intellectual endowments, which might have disputed the palm with the most lively and engaging personages of the court, he was yet devoured by ennui, and of this he was well aware, but his mind was made up to meet this ennui, as one of the necessary accompaniments of royalty. Devoid of taste in literary matters, he despised all connected with the *belles-lettres*, and esteemed men only in proportion to the number and richness of their armorial bearings. M. de Voltaire ranked him beneath the lowest country-squire; and the very mention of a man of letters was terrifying to his imagination from its disturbing the current of his own ideas; he revelled in the plenitude of power, yet felt dissatisfied with the mere title of king. He ardently desired to signalize himself as the first general of the age, and prevented from obtaining this (in his opinion) highest of honors, entertained the utmost jealousy of Frederick II., and spoke with undisguised spleen and ill-humor of the exploits of his brother of Prussia.

The habit of commanding, and the prompt obedience he had ever met with, had palled upon his mind, and impressed him with feelings of indifference for all things which thus appeared so easily obtained; and this satiety and consequent listlessness was by many construed into melancholy of disposition. He disliked any appearance of opposition to his will; not that he particularly resented the opposition itself, but he knew his own weakness, and feared lest he should be compelled to make a show of a firmness he was conscious of not possessing. For the clergy he entertained the most superstitious veneration; and he feared God because he had a still greater awe and dread of the devil. In the hands of his confessor he confidently believed was lodged the absolute power to confer on him unlimited license to commit any or every sin. He greatly dreaded pamphlets, satires, epigrams, and the opinion of posterity, and yet his conduct was that of a man who scoffs at the world's judgment. This hasty sketch may with safety be taken as the portrait of Louis XV., although much might be added; yet for the present I will confine myself to the outline of my picture, which I shall have frequent occasion to retouch in the course of my journal; it is my intention to present him in all possible lights before the reader, and I flatter myself I shall produce a perfect resemblance of the man I seek to depict. Let us now proceed to consider the duc de Richelieu.

This nobleman, when in his seventy-second year, had preserved, even in so advanced an age, all his former pretensions to notice; his success in so many love affairs, a success which he never could have merited, had rendered him celebrated; he was now a superannuated coxcomb, a wearisome and clumsy butterfly; when, however, he could be brought to exercise his sense, by remembering that he was no longer young, he became fascinating beyond idea, from the finished ease and grace of his manner, and the polished and piquant style of his discourse; still I speak of him as a mere man of outward show, for the duke's attainments were certainly superficial, and he possessed more of the jargon of a man of letters than the sound reality. Among other proofs of consummate ignorance he was deficient even in orthography, and was fool enough to boast of so disgraceful a fact, as though it conferred honor on him; perhaps, indeed, he found that the easiest way of getting over the business.

He possessed a most ignoble turn of mind; all feelings of an elevated nature were wanting within him. A bad son, an unkind husband, and a worse father, he could scarcely be expected to become a steady friend. All whom he feared, he hesitated not to trample under foot; and his favorite maxim, which he has a hundred times repeated to me, was, that "we should never hesitate to set our foot upon the necks of all those who might in any way interfere with our projects — dead men [he would further add] tell no tales!" There was one person, nevertheless, whom he detested and flattered at the same time, and this was Voltaire, who well repaid him in like coin. He called the duc de Richelieu, the tyrant of the tennis-court* (*tripot*), and the duke returned the compliment by invariably designating him "Scoundrel" and "Poetaster"; the only difference was that the duc de Richelieu only treated the poet thus in *sotto voce*, whilst M. de Voltaire sought not to conceal, either in his writings or conversation, his candid opinion of the illustrious duke and peer; and he might justly accuse the duke of ingratitude, for he, no doubt, owed a considerable portion of the reputation he enjoyed as a general, to the brilliant verses in which Voltaire had celebrated his exploits.

The marquis de Chauvelin was equally skilful as a warrior and diplomatist. Gentle, graceful, and witty, he joined to the most extreme versatility of talent the utmost simplicity of character. Once known, he could not fail of being valued and esteemed, and the king entertained the most lively regard for him. The noble minded marquis was far from taking advantage of his sovereign's favor, far from it; he neither boasted of it, nor presumed upon it. This truly wonderful man died, unhappily, too soon for me, for the king on whom he bestowed the sagest counsels, and for foreign courts who knew and appreciated his worth. I shall have occasion to speak of him hereafter; he had a brother, a wicked little humpbacked creature, brave as Cæsar, and a bitter enemy to the Jesuits, whom he did not a little contribute to overturn in the parliament of Paris, to which he belonged. The king detested this man as much as he loved and cherished the brother, and that is saying not a little.

The fourth guest was the duc de la Vauguyon, the really *perpetual* tutor to the princes of France, for he had educated four successively. He had displayed in the army both bravery and talent, but he was a confirmed Jesuit, and conducted himself towards me upon the strictest principles of his order. He will appear again on the scene hereafter, but for the present I must lay him aside, whilst I return to my *entrée* to the saloon, which I was about to enter.

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* *La Comédie Française.*

Immediately after Lebel had conducted me into it, he was called away, and quitted us. The king rose and approached me, saluting me with the most admirable gallantry, and addressing to me the most encouraging and gratifying words. His gentle, yet polished manners, his fine countenance, noble air, and the free and unrestrained glances of admiration which sparkled in his eyes, communicated to me a feeling of support and confidence which effectually reassured me, and roused me from the involuntary emotion I had felt at the moment when I first appeared in his presence. The king addressed a few words to comte Jean, and then regarded him steadily, as tho' he were trying to recall his features; but his eye quickly turned on me again, upon whom he bestowed the most intoxicating attention. Never was first sight more effective, and never did a flame so rapidly increase as did the passion of my noble adorer. Ere we had seated ourselves at the supper-table, he was ages gone in love.

It would have provoked a smile from any countenance to perceive how the respect and admiration with which the three courtiers regarded me increased in proportion as the sentiments of the king towards me betrayed themselves more and more. At first I had been considered as a person of little or no importance. Soon, however, as their sagacious eyes discovered the state of their master's mind, the air of familiarity with which they had regarded me gave place to a more studied politeness, which, in its turn, as matters progressed, was superseded by the most delicate attention; and ere we rose from table these gentlemen watched my looks with the most eager anxiety to obtain the honor of my notice, and hopes of future patronage from one whom they easily foresaw would be fully qualified to bestow it. Comte Jean observed all that was passing in profound silence. As for me, I talked and laughed with perfect freedom from restraint, and my frank unaffected mirth appeared to enchant the king; I knew that he was weary of the nice formalities of courtly beauty, and desired to refresh his eyes and ears with something less refined, and I gratified him to his heart's wish. The conversation became lively and animated, the merits of men of letters were discussed, the French and Italian theatre passed in review before us, and finally, we amused ourselves with anecdotes relative to the intrigues of court. The baron de Gonesse related to us a circumstance which had just been communicated to him by a county magistrate. I must here apprize the reader that these administrators of justice were directed to collect all the facts, scandalous, horrible, ridiculous, or piquant, which occurred within their jurisdiction, in order that, being forwarded to the king, they might aid in distracting his mind from the heavy cares of government. Alas! how many strange and eventful things have I since learned by similar channels.

The supper terminated, the king's friends remained some time conversing with us. Whilst these noblemen were busily celebrating my praises in words sufficiently loud to reach the king's ear, the baron de Gonesse, standing by my side, was prosecuting his suit in the most ardent terms. I received his overtures with becoming grace and modesty. As I have before said, the exterior of the king was very prepossessing, and what he wanted in youth, he made up by all the mature graces of dignified royalty. At last Lebel appeared, and made me a sign to rise from my seat. Up to this period nothing had arisen to betray the incognito of the august monarch, and in order to keep up my pretended ignorance of his grandeur, I quitted the apartment with little ceremony. Lebel conducted me to an adjoining chamber, furnished with the utmost magnificence. When we were seated, he turned to the comte Jean, who had followed us, and said, "It rests with yourself whether you will return to Paris, or remain at Versailles. But as for *milady*, who seems much fatigued, she will, we trust, honor us by accepting a bed at the castle."

My self-created brother-in-law understood as well as I did the significance of these words, and clearly read in their import how far I had attracted the favor of the king. In order to have rendered the impression more lasting, we could have wished that matters had been less precipitated, but we were under a roof where everything yielded to the caprices of its master, and resignation to his will became a matter of course. And here I trust I may be pardoned if I pass over certain details which could not, at this lapse of time, interest or amuse any one; besides, altho' I have found no difficulty in reciting former events of my life, I find my pen more prudish and coy than were my ears or mouth. All I shall say is, that the following day, as soon as I was left alone in my chamber, Lebel entered, and prostrating himself at the side of my bed,—

« Madame la comtesse, » said he, « is queen and mistress here. Not only has your noble lover failed to communicate to me the usual signal of disgust or dislike, but he has spoken of you to me in the most favorable light, declaring, that, for the first time in his life, he felt the influence of a true and sincere affection; for this reason he desired I would not convey to you the contents of this casket, as originally intended. »

« And what does it contain? » asked I, with childish eagerness.

« Oh, a trifle unworthy of her who is now the mistress of his warmest love; only a purse containing a hundred louis, and a suit of emeralds worth a similar sum. He bade me say it might have served to recompense a mere fleeting fancy, but that it is unworthy of your charms, nor can he insult you by the offer of it. »

« Will he then see me again? » inquired I.

« To-morrow evening, if agreeable to you. »

« Only say that his wishes are mine. »

« Would you wish to see the comte Jean before you rise? He has been waiting with the utmost impatience to see you since seven o'clock this morning. »

« Let him come in. »

The comte entered, and I saw by the triumphant joy painted on his face, that Lebel had told him of the propitious state of things. He ran up to me with out-stretched arms, congratulating me upon my success, and putting at the same time several questions, to which, either from mere womanly caprice, or presuming upon my recent elevation to the character of prime favorite, I refused to reply.

My folly drew down on me his severe anger, and several oaths escaped his lips, which, echoed back by walls so unused to similar violence, struck Lebel with terror. That faithful ally placed his hand over his mouth, imploring of him to recollect himself, and the place he was in. As for me, dreading some foolish burst of his impetuosity, I tried some of my sweetest smiles, and inviting him to sit beside me, related to him and Lebel those particulars which my pen refuses to retrace. Amongst other things, I told them I had said to the king, that I had perfectly known who he was all the preceding evening when supping with him, and that he had the simplicity to say, "he was surprised I had not appeared more embarrassed in his presence."

Our conversation terminated, I wished to return to Paris, and I was, without further hindrance, allowed to depart. Scarcely had I arrived there an hour, than I received from his majesty a magnificent diamond agraffe, worth at least 60,000 francs, and bank notes to the amount of 200,000 livres.

Comte Jean and myself were well nigh stupefied with astonishment at the sight of such treasures; to us, who had never in our lives possessed such sums, they appeared inexhaustible. My brother-in-law divided them into two equal portions, one of which he put into his pocket, and the other into my *escritoire*. With this arrangement I did not interfere; nothing seemed to me more simple than that he should satisfy his need out of my superfluity. I bestowed two thousand crowns upon Henriette, and expended in the course of the day at least a quarter of my riches in trifles, as unnecessary as useless; and all this without once remembering that as I owed my present abundance to a momentary inclination on the part of the king, so the turn of an hour, or a fresh fancy on the part of my munificent adorer, might reduce me to the unprovided state in which I had been so lately. That evening was passed *tête-à-tête* with comte Jean; he thought, as I did, that the foundation of our treasure was firm as a rock, and he gave me many counsels for the future which I promised to observe; for indeed it was to my own interest to do so. Upon how many follies did we then debate, which, but a few days afterwards we found practicable. The different ministers passed in review before us; some we determined upon retaining, whilst others were dismissed, and already I began in idea to act with sovereign power over these illustrious personages, amongst whom I anticipated shortly playing so important a part. « After all,» said I, « the world is but an amusing theatre, and I see no reason why a pretty woman should not play a principal part in it.»

CHAPTER III.

The king's message — Letter from the countess — A second supper at Versailles — The duc d'Ayen — A short account of M. de Fleury — The duc de Duras — Conversation with the king — The next day — A visit from the duc de Richelieu — Visit from the duc de la Vauguyon — Visit from comte Jean — Visit from the king — A third supper — Favor.

EARLY the following day I received a message from the king, accompanied with a bouquet of flowers tied round with a string of diamonds. A short letter was annexed to this splendid gift, which I would transcribe here, had it not been taken from me with many others. My reply, which I wrote upon the spur of the moment, was concise, and, as I preserved the rough copy, under the impression of its being one day useful, I can give the reader the exact words.

"The billet traced by your noble hands, renders me the happiest of women. My joy is beyond description. Thanks, monsieur le Baron, for your charming flowers. Alas! they will be faded and withered by to-morrow, but not so fleeting and short-lived are the sentiments with which you have inspired me. Believe me, the desire you express to see me again is entirely mutual; and in the impatience with which you await our next interview, I read but my own sentiments. The ardor with which you long to embrace me, is fully equalled by the affection which leads me to desire no gratification greater than that of passing my whole life in your society. Adieu, monsieur le baron; you have forbidden my addressing you as your rank and my respect would have me, I will therefore content myself with assuring you of the ardent affection of the

"COMTESSE DU BARRY."

The signature I adopted was a bold piece of falsehood, but it was too late to recede; besides, I was addressing myself in my letter, not to the king, but to the baron de Gonesse; for Louis, by I know not what unaccountable caprice, seemed to wish to preserve his incognito. I have since learned that Francis I. assumed the same name, altho' upon a very different occasion. Replying to a letter from Charles V., in which that emperor had given himself a long string of high sounding titles, he contented himself with simply signing his letter, "*François, baron de Gonesse.*" Louis XV. was very fond of borrowed appellations. Unlike the vanity so common to mankind, of seeking to set off their pretensions by assumed titles, it is the pleasure of royalty to descend to a lower grade in society when concealment becomes desirable, either from policy or pleasure; and Louis sought in the familiarity in which a plain baron might safely indulge, a relief from the ennui attendant upon the rigid etiquette of a regal state. I had omitted in my letter to the baron, to remind him that we were to meet that very evening, but that did not prevent my repairing to Versailles punctually at the appointed hour. I was conducted into the same apartment as before, where I found the same females who had then assisted at my toilet again prepared to lend their aid; and from this moment I had a regular establishment of attendants appointed for my use.

The moment the king was informed of my arrival, unable to restrain his impatience, he hastened to me to assist at my dressing table, and he continued standing beside me so long as the operation lasted; I felt greatly embarrassed, not knowing whether I durst take the liberty of requesting him to be seated. However, my silence on the subject was greatly admired, and ascribed to my perfect acquaintance with polished life, when in reality it originated from mere timidity. My triumph was complete; the monarch smiled at and admired every word as it fell from my lips, kissed my hands, and played with the curls of my long hair, sportively twisting his fingers amidst my flowing ringlets with all the vivacity of a lover of twenty. The company upon this evening was different from that of the former occasion, consisting of the duc de Duras, first gentleman of the bedchamber, and the duc d'Ayen, who had the reputation of being a great wit; however, in my opinion, he was much more deserving the character of a real fiend; his very breath was poisonous, and his touch venomous as the bite of an adder. I well remember what M. de Fleury said of him to the king in my presence. « Sire,» said he, « the thing I most dread in the world next to a bite from M. d'Ayen, is the bite of a mad dog.» For my own part, I did not in the end look upon him with less terror, and well he paid me for my fears. Upon one occasion, when the king was speaking of me to him, he said, « I am well aware that I succeed St. Foix.»

« Yes, sire »; replied the duke, « in the same manner as your majesty succeeds Pharamond! »

I never forgave him those words, dictated by a fiendish malice. However, upon the evening of my first introduction to him, he behaved to me with the most marked politeness. I was then an object of no consequence to his interests, and his vision had not yet revealed to him the height I was destined to attain. He looked upon me but as one of those meteors which sparkled and shone in the castle at Versailles for twenty-four hours, and sank to rise no more.

The duc de Duras was not an ill-disposed person, but inconceivably stupid; indeed, wit was by no means a family inheritance. Both father and son, good sort of people in other respects, were for ever saying or doing some good thing in support of their reputation for stupidity at court. One day the king quite jokingly inquired of the duc de Duras, what was done with the old moons. « Upon my word, sire,» replied he, « I can give you no idea, never having seen, but with your majesty's permission, I will endeavor to learn from M. de Cassini! » To such a pitch did the poor man's simplicity extend. Both father and son were nominated to attend the king of Denmark, when on his road to visit France. The king observed to a person who repeated it to me: « The French are generally styled a clever, witty nation; I cannot say I should ever have been able to discover it, had I been tempted to form my opinion from the specimen they have sent me.»

As far as I am concerned, after saying so many unfavorable things of the Messrs. de Duras, I must do them the justice to say, that their conduct towards me was everything that could be desired. I was always glad to see them; it gave my own imagination a sort of sedative dose to converse with these two simple-minded beings, whose interests I was always ready to promote by every means in my power, and I trust the memory of what I have done will be long remembered by the noble house of Duras.

This supper did not pass off so gaily as the former one. The duc de Duras spoke as little as possible, in the dread of making some unlucky speech, and the duc d'Ayen sat devouring the spleen he could not give vent to, and meditating fresh objects upon whom to exercise his malignity; he vainly endeavored to lead me on to make some ridiculous observation, but without success; happily for him, the king did not perceive his aim. My royal lover was indeed so entirely engrossed by me, that he lost all the duke's manœuvres; his transports appeared too much for his senses to sustain, and he vowed that I should never quit him more, but remain to be elevated by his power to the first place at court. At the monarch's sign, the two guests withdrew.

When the duc d'Ayen quitted the room, « That nobleman is by no means to my taste, » said I to the king, « he has the air of a spy, who wishes me no good. »

« Do you really think so, my lovely comtesse ? »

« I am certain of it; and I already shudder at the bare anticipation of an enemy having access to your majesty's ear. »

« Reassure yourself, » said the king, with the utmost tenderness, « in me you have a sure defender, who will never forsake you; look upon me from this minute as your natural protector, and woe to him on whose head your displeasure shall fall. »

After this conversation the king and myself retired to rest, and when he quitted me in the morning, he entreated me not to return to Paris, but to give him my company for a whole week. Lebel made his appearance to beg I would consider myself mistress of the apartments I occupied, and that he had received orders to provide me with an establishment upon the most handsome scale.

That very day Henriette, whom I had sent for, and instituted as my head waiting-woman, informed me, that an old gentleman, attired as tho' for a grand gala, but who refused to send in his name, begged to be permitted to pay his respects. I bade her admit him; it was the duc de Richelieu.

« Madame la comtesse, » said he, bowing low, « I come to complain of your want of condescension; unless, indeed, your memory has been at fault. Was it possible that when I had the honor of supping with you the other night, you did not recollect your former old friend? »

« If, indeed, my forgetfulness were a fault, monsieur le maréchal, it was one in which you bore an equal share; you were not more forward than myself in displaying marks of recognition. »

« That arose only from the dazzling increase of your beauty. You were but a nymph when last my eyes had beheld you, and now you are matured into a goddess. »

The duke then made some slight allusion to the family of madame Lagarde, but guessing with his admirable tact, that such reminiscences could not be particularly agreeable to me, he dexterously turned the conversation, by requesting permission to present to me his nephew, the duc d'Aiguillon, that he might leave a worthy substitute and champion near the king when state affairs called him into Gascony; he craved my kind offices to obtain the intimate acquaintance of comte Jean. They were subsequently at daggers drawn with each other, but this haughty overbearing lord conducted himself at first with the most abject servility. The third favor he had to solicit was that I would name him to the king as frequently as opportunities occurred to form one of our supper parties. All this I engaged to do, nor indeed could I refuse after the violent protestations of friendship he made me.

« You will, ere long, » said he, « see the whole court at your feet, but beware of considering them all as your friends; have a care, above all, of the duchesse de

Grammont. She has been long endeavoring to obtain the king's affections, and she will see with hatred and fury another more worthy engrossing the place she has so vainly contended for; she and her impertinent brother will call in the aid of the devil himself to dispossess you of your elevated seat; you are lost if you do not twist both their necks."

"How, monsieur le maréchal, shall I mark my career by a murder?"

"You take me too literally; I only mean that in your place I would not be at the trouble of keeping any terms with them."

"Ah, monsieur le duc, I understand you now; yet it seems a bad augury to have to begin my reign by cabals and intrigues."

"Alas! my fair comtesse, you are too good, too guileless for a court life; between ourselves we are all hypocrites more or less; mistrust every one, even those who make the finest protestations."

"In that case the first object of my suspicion would be my old and esteemed friend the maréchal de Richelieu."

"Ah, madame! this is not fair usage, thus to turn my weapons against myself, and to fight me with my own arms."

Upon this the duke quitted me, and scarcely had he left the room, when the duc la Vauguyon entered. This gentleman offered me no advice; he contented himself by styling the Jesuits his "very good friends," and continually turning the conversation upon their merits. I allowed him to express his attachment, without interruption, for these disagreeable men, whom I determined in my own mind to have nothing to do with, recollecting all I had heard of their dislike to our sex. After an hour passed in amusing talk, the duc de la Vauguyon retired, well pleased with his visit, and his place was immediately supplied by comte Jean, to whom I communicated all that had passed between my late visitors and myself.

"For heaven's sake," said he, "let us not be the dupes of these great lords; before we range ourselves under the banners of either of them let us secure our own footing; let us wait till you are presented."

"But, my good friend, I must be a married lady to obtain that honor."

"And so you will be shortly, do not be uneasy about that. I have written to my brother William to set out without delay for Paris. Your swain will be easily induced to marry you. What do you think of that?"

I gave comte Jean to comprehend, by signs, that I left my destiny in his hands, and he kissed my hands and withdrew. The king managed to steal a few minutes to converse with me.

"You did not intrust me, my sweet friend," said he, "with the circumstance of your having formerly known the duc de Richelieu; less reserved on the subject than you were, he told me he had seen you at the house of madame Lagarde, who considered you one of her dearest friends."

"Sire," replied I, "I was too much occupied with your majesty, to think of any other person in the world."

My answer delighted him, he looked at me in the most gracious manner.

"You would almost persuade me that you love me," said he, smiling.

"Indeed, your majesty," said I, "I only pray that you desire the continuance of my affection."

"In that case," replied he, kissing my hand with fervor, "you do but partake of my tenderness for you."

These words flattered my vanity, and here I must declare that if I never felt for the king that violent attachment which is termed love, I ever entertained for him the warmest esteem. He was so attentive, so kind to me, that I must have been a monster of ingratitude could I have looked upon him with indifference.

Our supper on this night was again lively as the first had been. The duc de Richelieu entertained us with several amusing anecdotes; not that they contained any thing very piquant, but the duke related them well, and we were all in the humor to be pleased, and laughed heartily at what he said. Comte Jean, whose eye constantly followed me, appeared perfectly satisfied with all I said or did. As for the king, he seemed enchanted with me, and seemed wholly occupied in watching my looks, that he might anticipate my wants. After supper, in the *tête-à-tête* which followed, he explained himself in terms which left me no doubt how securely my empire over him was established. Had he been less explicit on the subject, the flattering marks of favor, and the adulatory compliments I received from all on the following day, would well have assured me of it. I was no longer an obscure and friendless individual, but the beloved mistress of the king; I was, to use the expression of Lebel, a new sun which had arisen to illumine the horizon of Versailles. I could no longer doubt my power when I saw noble personages present themselves to solicit the most servile employments about my person. Amongst others, I might instance a certain lady de St. Benoit, who continued first lady of my chamber, during the whole time of my regency; — my justly-valued Henriette being contented to take the second place of honor.

CHAPTER IV.

The duc d'Aiguillon — The duc de Fronsac — The duchesse de Grammont — The meeting — Sharp words on both sides — The duc de Choiseul — Mesdames d'Aiguillon — Letter from the duc d'Aiguillon — Reply of madame du Barry — Mademoiselle Guimard — The prince de Soubise — Explanation — The Rohans — Madame de Marsan — Court friendships.

The duc de Richelieu, who was in haste to go to Guienne, lost no time in presenting to me the duc d'Aiguillon. He was not young, but handsome and well made, with much amiability and great courage. A sincere friend, no consideration could weaken his regard; an adversary to be dreaded, no obstacle could repress his boldness. His enemies — and amongst them he included the whole magistracy — his enemies, I say, have used him shamefully, but he treated them too ill for them to be believed in any thing they say of him. If he were ambitious, he had the excuse of superior merit, and if he showed himself too severe in one particular, it proceeded from an energy of mind which did not allow him to have more pity for others than they had for him. Do not, my friend, think that the attachment I had for him can transport me beyond just limits. Since he is in his grave, my illusions, if I had any, have dissipated. I only give to my deceased friends the tribute due to them — truth and tears. But really, without thinking of it, I am attributing to myself these virtues without necessity, forgetting that you are not one of those who would fain render me as black as possible in the eyes of posterity.

In proportion as the first sight of the uncle had prejudiced me against him, so much more did it propitiate me towards the nephew. I saw in him a generous heart, and a genius capable of lofty actions which you would vainly have sought for in the maréchal de Richelieu. No doubt at the beginning of our *liaison* the duc d'Aiguillon only saw in me a woman who could be useful to his projects and plans; but soon his heart joined the alliance, and a devotion of calculation was succeeded by a vehement passion, of which I was justly proud, as it subdued to my chains the most accomplished of courtiers.

Our first interview was lively. The maréchal and he supported the conversation with much gaiety. M. de Richelieu, as I have already told you, had neither wit nor information, but possessed that ease of the first circles, those manners of high breeding, those courtly graces, which often surpass wit and information.

« My nephew,» said he to the duke, « madame can do much for us, but we must first do something for her. Without support, without friends, she will be lost at Versailles; let us be her partisans if she will allow it, and let her youth have the benefit of our experience.»

The tone in which the duc d'Aiguillon replied delighted me. He said he was but too happy to serve me, and begged me to rely on him as I would on myself.

« But,» he continued, « but we have to struggle with a powerful party. The duchesse de Grammont and her brother are not the persons to give up the field without striking a blow. But, madame, by the assistance of your happy and lovely star, I will enter the lists with pleasure, and if a glance of your eyes will recompense a conqueror, I shall be he.»

« Oh,» exclaimed the duke, « my nephew's a second Amadis in gallantry, and of undaunted courage. You will be satisfied with him, madame, much more than with my son, who only resembles the family in his defects.»

The duc de Fronsac was justly hated by his father; he was what is called a decided scamp, without one redeeming point or virtue. Dissipated without agreeableness, a courtier without address, a soldier without courage, he thoroughly deserved his bad reputation. He was not hated, because hatred implies a species of honor, but he was universally despised. His father hated him: he hated his father. The reciprocity was edifying. I have often seen the duc de Fronsac, and always with disgust. He had incurred the extremity of punishment; when trying to carry off a butcher's daughter, he rendered himself guilty of the triple crimes of arson, rape, and robbery. This was the most splendid deed of his life, at least his father said so, the only one in which he had shown — guess what; for, my friend, I will not pen the cynical word made use of by his father. It must be confessed that we sometimes kept very bad company at Versailles. The king, who abhorred degrading actions, did not like the duc de Fronsac, but was full of kindly feeling towards the duc d'Aiguillon. The latter experienced the extent of his favor in his long and obstinate struggle with the parliament of Bretagne. It must be owned, that if he gained the victory at court, he decidedly lost it in the city, and I was publicly insulted on this account in the most brutal manner. However, the friendship which his first interview inspired me with, I have always preserved unaltered.

The week glided away, and each day my fortune seemed more fully assured. The love of the king increased, he heaped presents on me perpetually, and seemed to think he never could do enough for me. The bounties of Louis XV. were known, and instantly aroused against me the two enemies with whom I had been threatened — the duc de Choiseul and the duchesse de Grammont, his sister. I must say, however, that, at first, the brother contented himself with despising me, but the duchesse was furious; I had offended her feminine self-love, and she could not forgive me. I have told you that she obtained possession of the king by stratagem. This is fact. She was in a place of concealment during a regal debauch, and when Louis left the table, with his head heated by wine, she awaited him in his bed to commit a sort of violence on him. What curious ambition! As soon as this noble lady learned my position, she was desirous of knowing who I was, and I have been told since all the measures she took to learn this. She did not confine her search to the circle of Versailles, but hastened to prosecute her inquiries in Paris with M. de

Sartines. The lieutenant of police not suspecting the favor that awaited me, as well as that which I already enjoyed, and on the other hand persuaded of that of the Choiseul family, set all his bloodhounds on my traces. They did not fail to bring him back a thousand horrible tales about me, with which he gratified the duchesse, who, thinking thereby to do me a severe injury, spread in the château a multitude of prejudicial tales against me, hoping that they would reach the ears of the king and disgust him with his amour. It was at this juncture that appeared in the "*Nouvelles à la Main*" those infamous articles, collected in what they call the Collection of Bachaumont. From the same source proceeded the songs *à la Bourbonnaise* which filled Paris, and were sung about everywhere. These scandals produced no other effect than increasing the attachment which the king had for me, and to diminish that which he felt for the duc de Choiseul.

Passion never reasons; if it had common sense, it would perceive that it cannot disgust a lover by vilifying his mistress, but, on the contrary, interests his self-love in supporting her. Thus all these intrigues scathed me not; I did not mention to my counsellor comte Jean an insult which I met with in the park at Versailles from madame de Grammont. I did not tell it to the king, not wishing to create any disturbance at court. I avenged myself by myself, and think I conducted myself remarkably well in this adventure, which was as follows:

I was walking in the garden with Henriette, who had given me her arm; it was early in the morning, and the walks appeared solitary. We walked towards the side of the Ile d'Amour, when we heard the steps of two persons who came behind us. Henriette turned her head and then said to me, "Here are mesdames de Brionne and de Grammont." I knew the latter but very slightly, and the former not at all. Certainly she could not have been there by chance; they knew I should be there, and wished to see me closely. Not suspecting what was to follow, I was delighted at the rencontre. They passed us with head erect, haughty air; looked at me with a disdainful stare, laughed rudely and walked away. Altho' such behavior offended me, it did not put me out of humor; I thought it very natural for madame de Grammont to be irritated against me. Henriette had less magnanimity. She repeated so often how impertinent it was thus to insult a female honored by the bounties of the king, and so far excited my feelings, that instead of returning as prudence suggested, I followed the steps of these ladies. I did not proceed far before I rejoined them; they were seated on a bench, awaiting my arrival as it appeared. I passed close to them, and at that moment the duchesse de Grammont, raising her voice, said,

"It must be a profitable business to sleep with every body."

I was excessively nettled, and instantly retorted, "At least I cannot be accused of making a forcible entry into any person's bed." The arrow went to the mark and penetrated deeply. The whole countenance of the duchesse turned pale, except her lips, which became blue. She would have said something foolish, but madame de Brionne, more cool because touched less nearly, placed her hand over her companion's mouth. I in my turn walked away with Henriette, laughing till tears came into my eyes at this pleasing victory.

The duchesse de Grammont, who had no further inclination to laugh, told the whole to her brother. He, who loved her excessively, too much so perhaps, reprimanded her, nevertheless, and pointed out to her the disadvantage in an open struggle with me. Madame de Brionne was enjoined to secrecy, but that did not prevent her from confiding the affair to the dowager duchesse d'Aiguillon.

This latter was a lady of most superior merit, uniting to much wit more solid acquirements. She spoke English like a native. Her death, which happened in 1772, was a great misfortune to her son, to whom she gave the most excellent counsel. She told my adventure to her daughter-in-law, who, excessively ambitious, saw, without any pain, the increasing attachment of her husband for me. I must tell you, in a parenthesis, that I always lived on the best terms with her, and that, in my disgrace, her friendship did not weaken. I must do her this justice. All my *faithful friends* have not been equally faithful towards me.

These two ladies knowing this occurrence, the duc d'Aiguillon was not long kept in ignorance that something had happened. He came in haste to see me, and inquired what it was. But he asked in vain, I would not tell him. My secrecy hurt him, and on his return home he wrote to me. As I have great pleasure in telling you all that recalls this amiable gentleman to my mind, I will transcribe his letter, which will give you an opportunity of judging of the turn of his mind.

«I am very unhappy, madame. I had flattered myself with having obtained your confidence, but the obstinate silence which you have kept with me has cruelly informed me of my mistake. Allow the deep interest with which you have inspired me to offer a suggestion. You know nothing of forms, you are unacquainted with our usages: you require a friend who shall direct and counsel you. Why should you not select a man entirely devoted to you, and as equally so to the king, the king whose affections you possess — and who could refuse them to you? I pause. Nothing is more dangerous than to use a pen where we have a heart overflowing like mine. Be more gracious towards me, I ask it of you in charity, and take no pleasure in driving me to twofold desperation. Adieu, madame, etc.

«Signed, THE DUC D'A.»

I read and read again this epistle: it delighted me from beginning to end. I found in it a depth of passion which did not displease me: I perfectly comprehended the obscurity of the latter phrase. I needed a sort of mentor superior to comte Jean, and I preferred the duc d'Aiguillon to any other, because he pleased me. This feeling decided me, and I replied to him in these terms: —

«You are wrong, monsieur, to be annoyed, and to think that I am not disposed to grant you my confidence. It seems to me that I cannot place myself in better hands. However, we do not know each other well enough for me to repose in you at once: see me frequently, and then, with the habit of being in your company, I will allow myself to glide quietly into that state of confidence which you desire. Yes, I am indeed a stranger to all that passes around me: my only support is the protection with which the king honors me. That is all-powerful, but I will not employ it unseasonably or improperly. I know that I need the counsels of an honorable, prudent, and well-informed man. I accept, therefore, of yours; I even ask them from you, if your friendship go along with them. Adieu, monsieur. My regards are due to your uncle, the maréchal, the first time you write to him."

This letter filled the duc d'Aiguillon with joy. Some days afterwards, the prince de Soubise, who also wished to give me his advice, did not attain the same success. It must be owned, that, for a man of the world, he went about it in a very clumsy way. He committed the extreme error of selecting mademoiselle Guimard as mediatrix between himself and me. This lady came to me on the strength of our former acquaintance; she had so little sense as not to perceive the immense distance between us which a few days had caused, and that the opera-dancer kept by the prince de Soubise could have no relation with the favorite of the king of France. I endeavored, in vain, to make her perceive it, without mortifying her too much. She always called me her dear friend, and fairly slaughtered me with saying that *her* prince would protect me. It was singular for her to speak thus to me; to me from whom *her* prince solicited protection. She did not confine herself to this, she even insinuated to me that I should be a gainer in some way. I laughed outright at this, and said to the *valet de chambre*, who was stationed at the door, "Call mademoiselle's servants." This annoyed her excessively; all the muscles of her face were contracted with rage; but she restrained her wrath, saluted me with an assumed respect, and went away, after having so worthily acquitted herself of her foolish embassy.

She had quitted me for an hour, when I received a letter from him who had sent her. The prince de Soubise begged me to grant him an interview, in which he could enter into an explanation. I replied that I would receive him, and he came the same day.

"I am much pained, madame," said he, on entering, "that mademoiselle Guimard has communicated with so little address what I wished to say to you."

« Prince, I think you would have done better to have been the bearer of your own message. You know my station here, and would not have ridiculed me as she has done.»

M. de Soubise, much puzzled to know what she had said, asked me the question.

« Why,» I replied, « she said, that if I would follow your counsels, you would pay me for my condescension.»

« Ah! madame,» he exclaimed, « she has completely murdered me. I only charged her to offer my services to you, and throw myself at your feet, as I do now.»

« Rise, prince, I do not accuse you of such folly, and promise not to mention it : it is necessary, however, that you should know I have but one part to play here, that of pleasing the king. Any other character will not suit me. Honor me with your friendship, and accept mine in return. I cannot, must not, have any other union with you.»

Thus terminated this interview ; it did not suit me to give the prince de Soubise any hopes. He and all the Rohans would have lived on it ; they would have turned my confidence to their gain, and as they were for the most part sharpers, or something akin to it, my name would soon have been mixed up with some dirty transaction. His family was a hydra of avarice, and would alone have swallowed up all the wealth of France. If the king had taken one of the Rohan family for his mistress, I believe that the finance department would not have sufficed for one year's expenditure of this prodigal family. I had no objection to the prince de Soubise coming to supper with me, but I did not feel myself disposed to give him any control over my mind. I should have been ill-guided by a man who had no government of himself.

If M. de Soubise did not depart satisfied, madame de Marsan, his relative, to whom he related the bad success of his attempt, was not more so. She was a woman to have governed a kingdom, had she been allowed to do so. There was in her woman's head a capacity superior to that of all the men of her family. She had a great deal of ambition, and all her actions were the results of a premeditated plan. She would have ruled the king, the princes, the princesses, favorites, mistresses, the court, the city, the parliaments, and the army! Nothing would have been impossible to her; she was adequate to any thing. Circumstances did not give her the opportunity of displaying her genius. With great talents and keen perception, she was reduced to the government of her own family alone; that was but a trifling matter! In spite of her discontent, madame de Marsan preserved a sort of neutrality towards me. She allowed all sorts of ill to be spoken of me without ever repressing a word. She was then mute and motionless. She saw me torn to pieces without any emotion. However, when we were together she tried to cajole me in a thousand ways, all the time detesting me in her heart; and I, who could scarcely endure the sight of her, paid her a like number of little attentions. Thus surrounded by hypocrites, I became one myself. We learn to howl in the society of wolves.

CHAPTER V.

The duc de la Vauguyon and the comtesse du Barry — The marquis de Chauvelin and the comtesse — M. de Montbarrey and the comtesse — Intrigues — Lebel — Arrival of the du Barry family — The comte d'Hargicourt — The demoiselles du Barry — Marriage of the comtesse — The marquis de Bonrepos — Correspondences — The broken glass.

THE prince de Soubise was not the only person who wished to act in the capacity of mentor to me. M. the duc de la Vauguyon attempted also to be the guide of my youth. This nobleman was too much of a Jesuit not to have a nose of prodigiously fine scent. He perceived that the wind was in my favor, and approached me in consequence. I have mentioned to you his first visit, and he made me a second a few days afterwards. He appeared very affable, very conciliating, and insisted particularly several times, and that without any apparent motive, that the king, not being now engaged in the ties of wedlock, he should choose some agreeable companion, and assuredly could not do better than select me. The day after this visit, early in the morning, the duke sent me a splendid bouquet, a homage which he afterwards repeated, and then called on me a third time.

During this visit after a conversation on the embarrassments of an introduction at Versailles, he proposed that I should avoid them.

"You cannot conceal from yourself," he said, "how powerful will be the cabal against you; and, without including the Choiseuls, you will have especially to fear the pious party, who will only see in your intimacy with the king, allow me to say, a crying scandal, and one not profitable for religion."

« If the pious party unite with those who are not so to destroy me, » I rejoined, laughing, « I shall have all France against me. »

« No; but perhaps all the château. But there is a way of averting the storm. Attach yourself to the party of honest men who have been so greatly calumniated — the Jesuits. Philosophy, supported by the duc de Choiseul, has repressed them; but the high clergy and the *mesdames royales* are attached strongly to them, and you would interest them in your fortune by favoring these worthy fathers. »

« What! monsieur le duc, » cried I, « will *messeigneurs* the clergy of France, and *mesdames royales* and their suite be favorable to me, if I use my influence with the king in espousing the cause of the society of Jesus? »

« Certainly, madame, and I am authorized to promise you. I give you my word for this. Endeavor to re-establish the order, and there will not be one of us but will be zealous in supporting you. »

« I certainly am desirous of pleasing your friends; but I can see that, from the first moment of my appearance at court, I shall be at open war with the Choiseuls and the parliaments. »

« What matters it? I confess that the victory will not be easy at first, but there is no need to exaggerate the difficulties. It is true that the king has esteem for the duc de Choiseul, but he has much affection for you, which avails much more.

« As for the parliaments, he hates them, and for many years has been desirous of ridding himself of them entirely, and he will effect this by the help of God and your interference. »

« This will be hard work for one so weak as I am. »

« Oh, you are sufficiently powerful, I assure you. Only confide in me, the intermediary between you and my friends, let me guide you, and I will steer to the right port. What do you think of this, madame? »

« Oh! monsieur le duc, it is not at a moment that we can give a positive reply to such grave matters. I content myself in assuring you, that I have for you as much confidence as respect, and should be very happy to obtain your protection."

"My protection! Oh, heaven, madame, you are jesting. It is I who should be honored by your friendship."

"It is yours; but as yet I am nothing at court, and can do nothing there until I have been presented. It is for my speedy presentation that my friends should labor now."

"We will not fail, madame; and if you will allow me to come from time to time to converse with you, we can take our measures."

"Your visits will always be agreeable."

Such was the conversation which I had with the duc de la Vauguyon. I have given it somewhat at length, because it was the preface to a deep intrigue which made a vast noise. I think I extricated myself very well from the net in which the duke sought to catch me. I knew that his situation at Versailles compelled me to act with caution towards him. He was in good odor with *mesdames*, had the ear of the young dauphin and the princes his brothers. He deceived me like a true Jesuit as he was, in telling me that the *mesdames* were well disposed towards me; and on my side I cheated him with a promise of confidence and friendship which I never bestowed. Ah! my friend, again and again must I exclaim, what a villainous place is a court!

Whilst the duc de la Vauguyon was seeking to enlist me under the banners of heaven or the Jesuits, the marquis of Chauvelin also essayed to make me his pupil; but as frank as he was amiable, this nobleman did not go to work in a roundabout manner. He came to me loyally, requesting me to consider his interests and mine.

"The king likes me," said he, "and I am attached to him body and soul. He tenderly loves you, and I should have no difficulty in doing the same thing; but as I am no longer of an age to inspire you with the passion which I should feel towards you, I content myself with your friendship. I have no enemy here, and no wish to hurt any person. Thus you need not fear that I shall urge you to any measures that might compromise you. It is the hatred of the kingdom that you will have to fear. France is about to march in a better track, and the best plan is to follow its lead. It pains me, madame, to use language which may appear severe to you; we ought only to talk to you of your beauty and the love which it inspires. But in your situation, even that beauty may serve the interests of France, and it is for that motive that I come to solicit you."

I replied to M. de Chauvelin with equal frankness. I told him that my sole intentions were to confine myself to the circle of my duties; that I had none but to please the king, and no intention of mixing myself up with state affairs. This was my plan I can assure you. I flattered myself that I could follow it, not dreaming of those political nuisances into which I was precipitated in spite of myself. I added, nevertheless, that in my situation, which was delicate, I would not refuse the counsels of a faithful servant of the king, and that under this title M. de Chauvelin should be consulted on important occasions.

The marquis de Chauvelin had too much good sense, too much knowledge of the world, not to perceive a refusal concealed under this politeness. The secret inclination of my heart had already led me to select the duc d'Aiguillon for my director, and I could not reconcile myself to any other. He contented himself with asking me again for my friendship, which I willingly accorded him, and I have always found myself fortunate in his. Thus did I accept the offers of service from the prince de Soubise, the duc de la Vauguyon, and the marquis de Chauvelin.

A fourth sought to swell the ranks; the comte, afterwards prince, de Montbarrey. This gentleman made up in pretensions for what he lacked in talent. He was weak, self-important, selfish, fond of women, and endeavored to preserve all the airs of a man of good breeding in the midst of the grossest debauchery. He was full of respect for himself and his house, of which in time of need he could cite the whole genealogy. His nomination was a real scandal; no one dreamt of his ever being minister of war. It was one of the thousand follies of old Maurepas, whom the late king knew well, and called the ballad-maker of the council.

The comte de Montbarrey, whom I had known at Paris, came to me one fine day, fully powdered, perfumed, and apparelled. He had a smile on his lip, a loud tone, and an insolent look. He came not to ask my friendship, but my obedience. He told me that he loved me to distraction, and of course my head must be equally turned towards him. He amused me. I let him run out the full length of his line; and when he had spun it all out, I said to him, « Monsieur, be so good as to call me to the recollection of madame de Merfort.»

She was one of the gambling ladies, and at her house I had formerly met the chevalier de Montbarrey. My reply confounded him: he saw that he had gone the wrong way to work with me; and, raising the siege, he left me excessively embarrassed.

Figure to yourself, my friend, what confidence a man, lost in the crowd of lower courtiers, could inspire me with; for to judge of the proceedings of the comte de Montbarrey, it would have been necessary to have seen him as he then was, and not what he became since the imbecility of M. de Maurepas. When I told comte Jean of his visit, he would not believe such insolence. You must know that my brother-in-law also wished to direct me, but I did not consider him sufficiently clever. His marvellous genius was eclipsed in politics. He swore at my ingratitude, and I could only appease him by an offering of plenty of money.

In the midst of this cross-fire of intrigues, one was devised against me which might have terminated in my ruin; but, thanks to the indefatigable activity of comte Jean, only served to fix me more firmly in my situation. Lebel, of whom I have said nothing for this age, came to me one day: his face was sad, and his look serious. By his manner I augured that my reign had passed, and that I must quit my post. I awaited what he should say with mortal impatience. At length he began thus:

« Madame, you have many bitter enemies, who are laboring to effect your ruin with a blood-thirstiness which nothing can assuage. They have now spread a report that you are not married. This infamous calumny —»

« Ah, is that all ?» said I with joy; « no, my dear Lebel, this time they do not calumniate me. The worthy creatures for once are right.»

« What,» said Lebel, in a tone of alarm almost comic, « what, are you really not married ?»

« No.»

« Are you not the wife of the comte Guillaume du Barry ?»

« No.»

« Then you have deceived the king, and played with me.»

« Lebel, my friend, take another tone. No one has any right to complain. You have given me to the king as a person to please him; I do so. The rest can be no matter of yours.»

« Pardon me, madame; it is a matter of the greatest consequence to me. I am terribly compromised in this affair, and you with me.»

Lebel told me that the duchesse de Grammont had begged him to call upon her, and had bitterly reproached him about the mistress he had procured for the king: the duchesse affirmed that I was a nameless and unmarried creature; and added, that it was his duty to make the king acquainted with these particulars, unless I, the pretended wife of du Barry, would consent to go to England when a large pension should be assured to me.

« No, my dear Lebel, I will not go to England; I will remain in France, at Versailles, at the château. If I am not married I will be; the thing is easily managed.»

Lebel somewhat assured, begged me to send for comte Jean, and when he came he (Lebel) recommenced his tale of grief.

« You are drowning yourself in a glass of water,» said my future brother-in-law to him, beginning to treat him with less ceremony; « go back to the duchesse de Grammont, and tell her that madame was married at Toulouse. She will have an inquiry set on foot; in the mean while my brother will arrive, and the marriage will take place. Then we will show the rebels a real comtesse du Barry; and whether my sister-in-law be a lady of six months' standing or only of yesterday, that is of no consequence to the king of France."

After this conversation Lebel delivered the message to the duchesse de Grammont, who told him that she should write to Toulouse to the attorney-general. This was what the comte Jean wished and he was prepared for her.

But, you will say to me, was it certain that your asserted husband would marry you? Were there no difficulties to fear? None. Comte Guillaume was poor, talented, and ambitious; he liked high living, and would have sold himself to the devil for riches. He was happy in marrying me. Comte Jean would not have ventured such a proposal to his other brother, the comte d'Hargicourt, who had much good sense and great notions of propriety, and who at Versailles was called the *honnête homme;* a distinction not over flattering to his two brothers.

The same evening the whole family arrived, and was presented to me the next day. My two future sisters-in-law frightened me at first with their provincial manners and southern accent; but, after a few minutes, I found that this Gascon pronunciation had many charms with it. Mesdemoiselles du Barry were not handsome but very agreeable. One was called Isabelle, whom they had nicknamed *Bischi*, the other's name was Fanchon, and her name had been abbreviated to *Chon*. The latter had much talent, and even brought to Versailles with her, an instinctive spirit of diplomacy which would have done honor to a practised courtier. She would have been thought simple, unsophisticated, and yet was full of plot and cunning.

I was soon much pleased with her, and the king became equally so. He was always very much amused at hearing her talk *patois* (provincially), or recite the verses of one Gondouli, a poet of Languedoc. He used to make her jump upon his knees; and altho' she had passed the first bloom of youth, he played with her like a child. But what most particularly diverted the king, was calling my sister-in-law by her nickname; "*Petite Chon, grande Chon,*" he was always saying, "do this, go there, come here." Louis XV. did the same with his own daughters: he had amongst them a *Loque*, a *Graille*, a *Chiffe*, and they were the ladies Victoire, Adélaïde, and Sophie, whom he thus elegantly designated. I so soon saw the taste of the king for nicknames that I gave him one, it was *Lafrance.* So far from being angry with me, he laughed to tears every time that I called him so. I must confess, *en passant*, that the anecdote about the coffee is true.* I will only justify myself by saying, that if I expressed myself coarsely it was not in consequence of my vulgar education, but because the king liked such modes of expression.

Let me revert to my marriage, which was performed secretly at the parish of Saint Laurent. I believe the king knew of it, altho' he never alluded to it any more than myself. Thus the malice of my enemies was completely balked in this affair. Some days afterwards comte Jean received a letter from the attorney-general of the parliament of Toulouse, M. the marquis de Bonrepos-Riquet. This gentleman informed my brother-in-law that he had been applied to, to institute an inquiry at all the notaries, and amongst all the registers of the parishes for the proof of my marriage; that he warned us to be on our guard, and that whatever diligence he might be desired to employ, he should do nothing without informing us. We felt the obligation of this proceeding, and my brother-in-law thanked the attorney-general in my name as well as in his own. He told him that it was not at Toulouse that the parties interested should make their researches for my marriage certificate, but at Paris, either at the parish church of Saint Laurent, or at the notary's, Lepot d'Auteuil. M. de Bonrepos gave part of this reply to the duchesse de Grammont. Great was the bustle amongst the Choiseuls! I leave you to judge of the fury of the lady or ladies, for the comtesse de Grammont was no less irritated than the other, always prepossessed with the idea, that to please the king was to wrong their family. The comtesse de Grammont had not half the talent of the duchesse, she had only her faults. She showed herself so rude and impertinent towards me, that I was at length compelled, not to exile her of my own accord, but to allow that she should be so served. But I anticipate, for this did not occur until the following year.

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* Louis XV. had a habit of making his own coffee after dinner. One day the coffee boiled over the sides of the pot, and madame du Barry cried out, "*Eh, Lafrance, ton café f —— le camp.*"

The king by all his kindnesses endeavored to recompense me for these attacks: he appeared charmed to see me surrounded by my husband's family. He placed amongst the pages the vicomte Adolphe du Barry, son of comte Jean, a young man of great promise, but whose destiny was so brief and so unfortunate. My husband's family testified much affection for me, as did the duc d'Aiguillon, to whom I daily attached myself. He carefully kept from me all that could give me pain, and took a thousand precautions that no unpleasant reports should reach me. If we passed a short time without meeting he wrote to me, and I confess I was delighted with a correspondence which formed my own style. Mademoiselle Chon, my sister-in-law, and I also wrote to each other, and that from one room to another. I remember that one day, having broken a glass of rock crystal which she had given me, I announced my misfortune in such solemn style, and with so well feigned a tone of chagrin, that the letter amused the whole family. The king saw it, and was so much pleased that he kept it, and next day sent me a golden goblet enriched with stones, which I gave to Chon, to whom it rightfully belonged.

CHAPTER VI.

Journey to Choisy — The comtesse du Barry and Louis XV. — The king of Denmark — The czar Peter — Frederick II. — The abbé de la Chapelle — An experiment — New intrigues — Secret agents — The comtesse and Louis XV. — Of the presentation — Letter of the comtesse to the duc d'Aiguillon — Reply — Prince de Soubise.

UP TO this period I had resided constantly at Versailles or Paris, according to the pleasure of the king, but had never followed his majesty in any of his journeys. He wished to pass some days at his delightful château at Choisy, situated on the banks of the Seine. It was decided that I should be of the party, taking the name of the baroness de Pamklek, a German lady, as that would save me from the embarrassment in which I should be placed with the king in consequence of my non-presentation. The prince de Soubise, the ducs de la Trimoulle, d'Ayen, d'Aiguillon, and the marquis de Chauvelin, were also to attend the king. The king remained nearly the whole time with me, and the *entrée* to my apartment became a favor not accorded to every body. A small committee met there, and talked of every thing except what is rational; and I can assure you that with such conversation time passes very quickly.

One day the king entered my apartment holding in his hand a letter.

"I am about to receive," said he, "a visit that will not give me much pleasure. My brother of Denmark is traversing Europe, and is about to come to France. *Mon Dieu!* what inconvenient persons are your travelling kings! Why do they leave their kingdoms? I think they are very well at home."

"Yes, sire, but there is an excuse for them: they are weary of admiring your majesty at a distance, and wish for the happiness of knowing you."

At this compliment the king rubbed his hands with a smile, which he always did when he was satisfied, and then said,

« There is not in the hearts of foreign potentates the same affection towards my person as you feel. It is not me but France they wish to see. I remember that when very young I received a visit from the czar Peter the Great, Peter the First I mean to say. He was not deficient in sense, but yet behaved like a boor: he passed his time in running over the academies, libraries, and manufactories: I never saw such an ill-bred man. Imagine him embracing me at our first interview, and carrying me in his arms as one of my valets would have done. He was dirty, coarse, and ill-dressed. Well, all the Frenchmen ran after him; one would have supposed by their eagerness that they had never seen a regal countenance.»

« Yet there was no occasion to run very far to see the handsome face of a king.»

« Hold your tongue, madame la baronne de Pamklek, you are a flatterer. There is a crowned head which for thirty years has desired to visit France, but I have always turned a deaf ear, and will resist it as long as possible.»

« Who, sire, is the king so unfortunate as to be banished by you from your majesty's presence?»

« Who? The king of philosophers, the rival of Voltaire, my brother of Prussia. Ah, my dear baronne, he is a bad fellow; he detests me, and I have no love for him. A king does wisely, certainly, to submit his works to the judgment of a Freron! It would be outrageous scandal if he came here. Great and small would crowd around him, and there would not be twenty persons in my train.»

« Ah! sire, do you think so?»

« I am sure of it. The French now-a-days do not care for their kings, and *la Fronde* will be renewed at an early day. After all, philosophers believe that Frederick II. protects them: the honest man laughs both at them and me.»

« At you, sire? Impossible.»

« No, no; I know the impertinences he is guilty of towards me: but let him. I prefer making my court to the pretty women of my kingdom instead of to my pages. You may depend upon it that if he came to Versailles he would debauch some of them.»

The king, charmed at having said this malicious speech, rubbed his hands again.

« Really, sire,» I replied, « I am astonished that this prince, having such disgusting inclinations, can have much *éclat* attached to his name.»

« Ah, that is because he has great qualities: he will not allow himself to be cheated. Do you know that he is acquainted with the disposal of his finances to the last farthing?»

« Sire, he must be a miser.»

« No, madame, he is a man of method. But enough of him. As to his majesty of Denmark, altho' he would have been as welcome to stay at home, I shall receive him with as much attention as possible. The kings of Denmark and Sweden are my natural allies.»

The king changed the subject, and said, « There is an abbé, named la Chapelle, whom I think half cracked. He flatters himself that he can, thro' the medium of some apparatus, remain on the water without sinking. He begs my permission to exhibit his experiment before me; and if it would amuse you, we will have the exhibition tomorrow.» I accepted the king's proposal with pleasure.

On the next day we went in a body to the terrace of the château. The king was near me with his hat in his hand; the duc de Duras gave me his arm. M. l'abbé awaited us in a boat: he flung himself bodily into the water, dressed in a sort of cork-jacket, moved in any direction in the water, drank, ate, and fired off a gun. So far all went off well, but the poor abbé, to close the affair, wrote a letter to the king. The letter was carried in great pomp to his majesty. It contained two verses of Racine, which had some double allusion to the experiment. This, you may be sure, was interpreted in the

"*MONSIEUR, I HAVE ENEMIES ENOUGH AT COURT WITHOUT YOU. WON'T YOU TELL ME HOW I CAN WIN YOUR FRIENDSHIP?*"

By courtesy of Mr. David Belasco and Mrs. Leslie Carter. This scene is from David Belasco's play, *Du Barry*, played at Belasco's Theatre, New York, with Mrs. Leslie Carter as La Du Barry.

worst manner. The duc d'Ayen gave the finishing stroke to the whole, on his opinion being asked by the king.

"Sire," said he, "such men ought to be thrown into the water; but all we can wish for them is, that they should remain there."

The abbé was not more fortunate in the evening. He presented himself at supper, but the king did not address a word to him, and he was compelled to bear the malicious jokes of the courtiers. But let us leave Choisy and the experimentalist, and return to Versailles and myself.

My friends were excessively desirous for my presentation, which would decide my position at the château. As yet I only had an equivocal existence, having rank neither at play, theatre, or public festival; so that if the king should be capricious I could be dismissed as one of the demoiselles of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*. The duc d'Aiguillon, whose attachment to me increased, calculated accurately all the advantages of this presentation. It would place me on the same footing with madame de Pompadour, and compel the ministers to come and work with me. The duke did not doubt but that M. de Choiseul would refuse to pay his *devoirs* to me, and that his resistance would lead to his fall. But for my presentation, it was necessary not only that the king should consent, for of that I was certain, but that he should desire it, and his desire could not be depended on.

Louis XV. was excessively timid: with an air which appeared of a dreadnaught quality, he was fearful at heart. The clamors of Versailles kept him in alarm; and he kept at his own court and at foreign courts secret agents, whose only care was to report to him the complaints of the people and the sarcasms and satires of society. The king was attached to them; and when the force of circumstances compelled him to abandon them, he still supported them clandestinely with all his power. A proof of what I advance may be known as regards the chevalier or chevalière d'Eon, I know not which. But these secret agents were, unknown to the king, all devoted to the parliaments, and consequently inimical to courtiers, favorites, and especially mistresses. God knows how they disposed of us! By these unpropitious channels the king had learnt all the hatred which was borne to madame de Pompadour. He was afraid of exciting the discontent of the people by announcing another mistress, and was no less intimidated at the severity of madame Louise, and the ill-humor of his other children. He loved his pleasure much, but his ease more.

Comte Jean, who was restrained by no considerations, advised me to overlap all difficulty, by asking the king myself for the favor which I coveted. His advice seemed rational, and I was besides urged on to do so. Each day brought to me impertinences said of me by the noble ladies of the château. I learnt that they boasted that I should never set foot in the great apartments, but should remain the obscure mistress of the king. This made me impatient, and by degrees deprived me of my natural gaiety.

One day when the king was with me, he perceived my want of spirits.

«What ails you?» said he, with the greatest solicitude.

«What ails me!» replied I, «I wish I were dead, rather than see myself the butt of all the scandal of the foul-mouthed gossips of your court.»

The king, suspecting the confidence I was about to repose in him, was sorry he had asked for it, and was silent. He began to play a tattoo with his fingers on the chimney-piece. At this moment mademoiselle Chon came in. The king, delighted at seeing her, instantly inquired into her state of health. She, after a profound reverence, said,

«Sire, how can I be well when there is trouble in my family?»

«Ah, *bon Dieu!* what is this?» said he, turning to me.

«I am insulted, hooted: they say that I have the misfortune to be no longer in the good graces of your majesty.»

«Ah, tell them they lie in their throats,» replied the king, kissing me on the forehead; «you are the woman of my heart, and she whom I would fain load with honors.»

« Your majesty speaks to me," I answered, « with great condescension [my sister-in-law left the room that she might not spoil the explanation], but yet you are the cause of the insolences which I am subjected to from the vile crew."

« What is the matter with you to-day? In truth you are a perfect little devil."

« I wish I were, that I might punish evil tongues, since there is no king of France to avenge me."

« You are severe, madame," replied Louis XV., turning his imposing and handsome face towards me, and to which he vainly endeavored to give an air of anger. I saw my success, and added,

« Yes, sire, it is insupportable for me to think that I am supposed not to possess your friendship, and that I only play the part of a temporary friend. It makes me wretched: you must not be angry if I complain of you to your royal self."

« Well, well, you madcap, what must I do? whom must I banish?"

« Oh, sire, no one: with your august support I fear no person; nothing but appearances."

« You are an excellent creature; in your place madame de Pompadour would have imprisoned half France."

« That was because she loved revenge better than she loved your majesty. As for me, I should be miserable if I were the cause of one single family complaining against you."

The king delighted at these words, which really came from my heart, embraced me tenderly two or three times, and said,

« I wish your enemies could understand you, for they would soon be at your knees. But if we imprison or exile no person, how shall we strike terror into them?"

« It is not terror but envy that I would excite. Let me be presented at court, and all my wishes will be satisfied."

« I cannot for the life of me divine why you should lay so much stress on coming to weary yourself with the ceremonies of myself and daughters. Heaven preserve you from all the irksomeness of court ceremony!" And Louis XV. sighed. "Did you ever think," he added, "of all the vanities, all the interests I have to manage; all the intrigues that are perpetually agitating, and all the opposition made to me? The court, the city, the people, will rise against me: they will clamor, groan, complain; verse, prose, epigram, and pamphlet will appear in uninterrupted succession. You would be first attacked, and hatred will perhaps extend to me. I shall see again the times when the Damiens, in the name of the parliaments, as one party says, in the name of the Jesuits, as the other party says, and, what is more true, in the name — "

The king suddenly paused; a deep shade of melancholy settled on his features, his noble head dropped on his bosom. Louis XV. remained for some time motionless; at length,

"Well," he exclaimed, attempting to force a smile, "well! I will write to the ladies de Grammont, to inform them that they need not give themselves the trouble to remain near me at the château."

On his saying these words I darted towards the door, and went into my chamber. The king followed, and finding there mademoiselle Chon, who was working at some tapestry, said to her,

"Mademoiselle, I confide to your care, and by oral *lettre de cachet*, the most amiable little devil in France. And now, mademoiselle du Barry, having nothing further to add, I pray God to take you to His powerful and holy keeping."

After this pleasantry the king, delighted at the gay termination of a somewhat serious scene, went, or rather vanished; for to use a proverbial expression, he ran like a thief.

As soon as I was alone with my sister-in-law, I told her all that had passed.

"I see," said she, "that the king is fearful of offending the duc de Choiseul, and giving annoyance to his daughters. But a step must be determined on which will place you out of the reach of complete disgrace.

Would it not be best to get some nobleman, who can do so with influence, to speak to him on the subject? If the duc de Richelieu were here — »

« But, » I instantly exclaimed, « have we not his nephew, the duc d'Aiguillon? He is well with the king, and I am certain will take the most lively interest in all that concerns me. »

« I have no doubt of it, » said Chon, with a sly look. « Write to him to come, and you can arrange your ulterior proceedings. »

On this advice, which was quite to my taste, I went instantly to my writing-table, the last present which the king had made me. It was made of silver gilt, and china slabs beautifully painted. When I opened it, a glass was lifted which reflected my countenance. I sat down and wrote the following note to the duc d'Aiguillon: —

> «You must be content. I want your assistance, I really want it. The moment has come for deserving all my confidence. Will you have it at all risks and perils? Reflect well before you undertake this: if you accept, come to-day at five o'clock precisely, neither later nor sooner.»

A little while afterwards the following reply was brought.

> « One thing displeases me in your letter which else enchants me. You appear to doubt my obedience. Am I not your slave? And when you say to me *go*, will I not *go?* Rely on me as on yourself; even more: for your vivacity may lead you into error, and I shall preserve my reason. Yes, madame, I will, when near you, preserve my reason when your interests are at stake. At the fixed hour I shall have the honor to lay at your feet my respectful homage and boundless devotion.»

It was impossible to express a real sentiment with more delicacy. I was charmed at it, no longer doubting that the duke would consider my interests as his own. I awaited the hour of five with impatience, when my good fortune brought the prince de Soubise. After the first compliments,

« Well, madame la comtesse, when is your presentation to take place? »

« I do not know, monsieur le maréchal; there are ob stacles in the way. I fear that they who wish to injure me abuse their influence with the king."

"I see that his majesty hesitates, altho' he is desirous of giving you station. He must be stimulated to know that he is master; and that if he shows any wavering in this particular, it will be made use of to govern him hereafter."

Heartily did I applaud the language of M. de Soubise: I did not suspect that the dear prince had another motive behind. At the end of the interview he said,

"Madame, you would not have been as you now are had you been more conciliatory towards me. I know the king, and know how to manage him. I flatter myself that you would have been now presented had you deigned to hear my advice."

"Did I reject it? Was I wrong in declining to have mademoiselle Guimard as ambassadress? Were you assured of her silence? Might she not have compromised us?"

"You are right; I did as one would have done at your age, and you have done as I should do at mine; but there is always time to amend."

"Certainly, prince."

"You accept my advice, then."

"Yes," I replied, seeing the defile in which he wished to entrap me, "yes, if I am presented thro' your influence, from that moment you become my guide and mentor. But it is important that the presentation be not delayed; I rely on you to speak to the king this day about it; and I know that he will give me every particular of the immense service you will render me."

For once the madcap girl got the better of the practised courtier. M. de Soubise, taken in his own snare, politely excused himself, and left me with an assurance that he would speak to the king. He did speak, but obtained nothing more than any other. You will see in my next letter that I did not arrive at the accomplishment of my wishes without much trouble. There were in this affair more intrigues for and against me than were afterwards set on foot to decide war with America.

CHAPTER VII.

The comtesse and the duc d'Aiguillon — M. de Soubise — Louis XV. and the duc d'Aiguillon — Letter from the comtesse to the king — Answer of the king — The « *Nouvelles à la Main.* » — The comtesse and Louis XV. — The supper — The court ladies mystified — The comtesse and M. de Sartines.

I WAS still triumphing at the skill which I had displayed in my conference with the prince de Soubise when the duc d'Aiguillon entered.

« Good heaven, » said he, kissing my hand very tenderly, « into what inquietude did you throw me by your dear and cruel letter. The ambiguity of your style has caused me inexpressible sorrow; and you have added to it by not allowing me to come to you at the first moment. »

« I could not: I thought it would be dangerous for you to appear before the king previously to having seen me. »

« Would the king have thought my visit strange? » asked the duke, not without some emotion.

« That is not the point. The black spite of my enemies has not yet deprived me of the counsels of a friend. But as it is necessary to speak to the king in my favor, I wish that he should not know that you do so at my request. »

After this I related to the duke my conversation with the king.

« Your situation is delicate, » said he to me, « but it should not trouble you. The king is weak, we must give him courage. It is his pliancy of disposition rather than his resistance that we must contend with, and I go to act upon it. »

I then instructed the duke with what had passed between me and the prince de Soubise. When I had done, the duke replied:

« Expect nothing from the prince de Soubise: he will speak, no doubt; but how? In a jesting, laughing way. If, however, you think he can at all serve you, give him all your confidence.»

«No, no, never,» I replied with quickness; «it is not a thing to be done lightly; we do not select a confidant, counsellor, or friend, at random. Do you not know this, M. le duc? It is requisite that the heart of the one who speaks should repose itself on the heart of the friend who listens. I repeat to you that I have no feeling of confidence towards M. de Soubise. In fact,» I added with visible and troubled emotion, «my choice is made, and you have too much heroism to wish to combat it.»

At these flattering words the duke precipitated himself at my feet, and swore to support my cause with all his power and interest. I replied that I fully relied on his devotion and prudence. Comte Jean entered, and it was agreed between us three that I should say no more to the king of my presentation before the duc d'Aiguillon had spoken to him of it; that I should content myself with complaining without peevishness, and that we should leave the opening measure to the prince de Soubise, and let him break the ice to his majesty.

The prince de Soubise behaved exactly as the duke had told me: he came to me the next morning with a mysterious air, which already informed me of all he had to say. He said that he had vainly tormented the king; that his majesty wished things to remain just as they were, and desired that until a new order of things nothing should be altered.

«I am sorry for it, monsieur le maréchal,» I replied. «Whilst I am in this precarious situation, whilst I remain in a corner of the stage as a confidante of tragedy, I can do nothing for my friends, particularly for you, monsieur le maréchal.»

«On the contrary, madame,» he replied, «the king will be more disposed to listen to you whilst he will suppose that your influence is unknown.»

«Oh,» cried I with a feeling of anger, «you gentlemen courtiers think of nothing but politics. As for me, who am a woman, I have other matters for consideration: I must have honors, title, rank. My self-love suffers cruelly when I see myself immolated by the fear which the ladies de Grammont and three or four other intriguers of their party are able to excite.»

The prince was somewhat startled at the freedom of language which I used towards ladies in such credit at court: he begged me to moderate my feelings, and be less moved and excited. By this the prince de Soubise lost the esteem which I might have accorded him, and the second place in my counsels, which I might have given him.

I told the duke, who came to see me the moment afterwards, of the failure of the prince's attempt. He told me that he had not hoped for a better result. He went to the king, flattering himself with hopes of better success, but did not find him.

The daughters of Louis XV. had united against me with a fury which nothing could justify. They were incessantly talking scandal of my past life, as if there were only saints at court, as if they had no pranks of their own to reproach themselves with. All the château knew of their lovers, and there was *living* evidence of the tenderness of madame Adélaïde: as for madame Louise she was an angel upon earth, and was the only one who did not join in the cry against me. On the other hand, the king, whilst he had but little love for his dear daughters, preserved towards them a complaisance and external appearance of kindness which was a substitute for parental love. When *mesdames royales* cried out, he stopped his ears with his two hands, and seemed, whilst looking proudly at France, to say, «Am not I a good father, and are not my daughters very happy, for I let them cry out with all their might?»

The next day the duc d'Aiguillon went again to the king, and found him bewildered with family scenes and the murmurings of the Choiseuls. When my ambassador had delivered his message, the king asked him if he, as well as the prince de Soubise, had been set upon his haunches by me.

The duke, nothing intimidated at this, told the king that far from having wished that he should be my interpreter, I had requested him not to allude to the matter.

« Why, then, » said Louis XV. laughing, « do you not follow the advice of the comtesse? »

« Because I entertain a sincere attachment for her, and that I am vexed to hear it said that there are persons who lead your majesty. »

« Who are the insolents that hold such language? »

« They surround you, sire. There is not a female here but affirms that you dare not decide on the presentation of the comtesse. »

« I alone am master, and will let them know it when the opportunity arrives; but the present moment is not fitting. The comtesse knows how well I love her; and if she will prove her friendship towards me, she will remain quiet for some time. »

The duke thought it best to be silent, and came to me. After relating the conversation, he added, « Do not appear at all dejected; the king would not then visit you lest he should find you out of temper. Were I you I should write to him; a word of peace would set him at ease. »

I approved this advice, and instantly penned the following letter: —

> «Sire — They tell me that your majesty has been tormented on my account. It is a treason of which I alone could believe myself capable. But why should I complain? You have done so much for me that I ought to esteem myself happy: your august friendship consoles me thro' all my annoyances. Be assured that henceforth I shall pout no more; I will be the best sheep in the world, relying on my shepherd for not having my fleece cut too closely; for after all I think I am the petted ewe, etc.»

A short time afterwards a page brought me a splendid box of *bonbons* with a pair of ruby ear-rings surrounded with diamonds, and this short billet: —

> «Yes, assuredly you are my pet ewe, and always shall be. The shepherd has a strong crook with which he will drive away those who would injure you. Rely on your shepherd for the care of your tranquillity, and the peace of your future life.»

In the evening the king visited me. He was embarrassed, but I set him at ease by showing him a laughing countenance, talking only of his present, which I had in my ears, and shaking my head about to keep the drops in motion, which sparkled with great brilliancy. He was pleased at this, and did not leave me all the evening. In the morning we were the best friends in the world.

Some days elapsed, when comte Jean came to me, bringing two infamous articles which had appeared in the "*Nouvelles à la Main*," and were directed against me. They were atrocious and deeply chagrined me: I placed them on the mantel-piece, where all who came in could see them. The duc de Duras read them, and said, "Conceal these atrocities from the king."

"No," was my reply, "I wish him to read them, that he may know how his affections are respected, and how the police of Paris are employed in doing their duty to the throne."

These last words annoyed M. de Duras, between whom and M. de Sartines there was a connection: the duke was indebted to the lieutenant-general of police for the special surveillance which he kept over a young girl of whom he, the duc de Duras, was foolishly enamoured. Trembling for his *dear friend* M. de Sartines, he wrote to him in haste, but had not courage or talent enough to undertake the defence of the guilty person.

The king came as usual; his general station was at the chimney-piece, where he amused himself with looking at the baubles that ornamented it. The "*Nouvelles à la Main*" fell in his way. He read them once, then again; then, without uttering a word, threw them into the fire. I observed him, and saw that he was full of emotion which he sought to conceal, but the anger burst forth soon. The prince de Soubise, who supped with us that evening, asked the duc de Duras if he had read the "*Gazette de France.*"

"No," was the reply; "I seldom read such nonsense."

"And you are quite right," said the king. "There is at present a most inconceivable mania for writing. What is the use, I ask you, gentlemen, of this deluge of books and pamphlets with which France is inundated? They only contain the spirit of rebellion: the freedom of writing ought not to be given to every body. There should be in a well-regulated state seven or eight writers, not more; and these under the inspection of government. Authors are the plague of France; you will see whither they will lead it."

The king spoke this with an animated air, and if at this moment M. de la Vrillière had come to ask for a *lettre de cachet* against a writer, the king would not have refused it.

"Besides," added the king, in a tone of less anger, but no less emphatically, "I see with pain that the police do not do their duty with regard to all these indignities."

"Yet," said the duc de Duras, "M. de Sartines does wonders."

"Then why does he tolerate such insults? I will let him know my discontent."

The duc de Duras was alarmed, and kept his mouth closed. The king then, resuming his gaiety, joked the two gentlemen on their secret intrigues: then changing the conversation suddenly, he talked of the expected arrival of the king of Denmark.

"Duc de Duras," said he, "you and your son must do the office of master of ceremonies to his *Polar* majesty. I hope you will endeavor to amuse him."

"Yes, sire."

"Mind, what you undertake is no joke. It is no easy matter to amuse a king."

This was a truth which I perceived at every moment, and our monarch was not the one to be amused with trifling exertion. Frequently when he entered my apartment he threw himself on an ottoman, and yawned most excessively; yes, yawned in my company. I had but one mode of rousing him from this apathy, but it was a sure one. I spoke of the high magistracy and its perpetual resistance to the throne. Then the king aroused, instantly sprung from his seat, traversed the room with rapid strides, and declaimed vigorously against the *black* *gowns;* thus he styled the parliaments. I confess, however, that I only had recourse to the *black gowns* at the last extremity. Little did I think that at a later period I should league myself against them. On the one hand, the duc d'Aiguillon hated them mortally, and on the other, the comte Jean, like a real Toulousian, would have carried them in his slippers; so that wavering between the admiration of the one and the hatred of the other, I knew not which to listen to, or which party to side with. But to return to present matters.

The king was always thinking of the "*Nouvelles à la Main,*" and determined to avenge me as openly as I had been attacked. Two or three days afterwards he gave a supper, to which he invited the duchesse and comtesse de Grammont, madame de Forcalquier, the princesse de Marsan, the maréchale de Mirepoix, and the comtesses de Coigny and de Montbarrey. They were seated at table laughing and amusing themselves; they talked of the pleasure of being to *themselves*, of having no *strangers;* they pierced me with a hundred thrusts; they triumphed! and yet the king was laughing in his sleeve. At a premeditated signal the duc d'Aiguillon, one of the guests, asked his majesty if he had seen the comtesse du Barry that day. This terrible name, thrown suddenly into the midst of my enemies, had the effect of a thunder-clap. All the ladies looked at each other first and then at the king, and the duc d'Aiguillon, preserving profound silence. His majesty then replied, that he had not had the happiness of visiting me that day, not having had one moment's leisure; then eulogized me at great length, and ended by saying to the duke, "If you see the comtesse before I do, be sure to say that I drank this glass of wine to her health."

The ladies did not anticipate this. The duchesse de Grammont particularly, in spite of long residence at court, turned pale to her very ears, and I believe but for etiquette she would have fallen into a swoon. I learnt afterwards from the maréchale de Mirepoix, that the duchesse, on going home, gave herself up to a fit of rage, which did not terminate even on the following day. When the king related this occurrence to me, he was as proud of it as if he had done a most courageous deed.

But I have omitted a day which was of great importance to me in its consequences. I mean the day which followed that on which I had complained to the duc de Duras of M. the lieutenant of police. In the morning early my sister-in-law came into my room.

« Sister, » said she, « comte Jean is here with M. de Sartines, who begs to pay his respects to you. Will you receive him ? »

« M. de Sartines! Yes, let him come in; I will treat him as he deserves. »

Comte Jean then came in, preceded by the lieutenant of police: he wore a large peruke with white powder, and curled with the utmost care. Wigs were his mania, and he had a room filled from floor to ceiling with these ornaments. The duc d'Ayen said, that he never should be in trouble about the council of state, for in case of need, it might be found and replenished from the house of the lieutenant of police. Let us leave wigs and revert to M. de Sartines.

He appeared before me with the air of Tartuffe, and, forgive the phrase, *en vrai capon.*

« Madame, » said he to me, « I have been informed that I am in disgrace with you, and have come to inquire how I may extricate myself from this misfortune. »

« You ought to know, sir. Twice in one month have I been shamefully insulted; and yet the first intimation of such a thing ought to have put you on your guard. »

M. de Sartines, whom my tone had much surprised, endeavored to justify himself, when comte Jean said to him,

« My dear lieutenant of police, all you have said goes for nothing. One thing is certain, and that is, that there is a deficiency of respect towards my sister-in-law. You say that it is not your fault: what proof do you give us of this ? What inquiries have you made ? What measures have you taken ? Any ? Why do you come to us if you aid our enemies ? »

M. de Sartines would fain have ensconced himself in his own dignity.

« M. du Barry,» was his reply, « I shall render an account of my conduct to the king.»

« Very well, sir,» I replied, « but do not suppose that either you or the Choiseuls can give me any cause of fear.»

M. de Sartines was thunderstruck; my boldness astonished him. At length he said,

« Madame, you are angry with me causelessly; I am more negligent than culpable. It is useless to say this to the king.»

« I will not conceal from you, sir, that he knows it all, and is greatly discontented with you.»

« I am lost then,» said M. de Sartines.

« Lost! not precisely,» replied comte Jean; « but you must decide at once and for ever what party you will join. If you are with us they will use you harshly; if you take the opposite party look to yourself. Choose.»

After some turnings and twistings, accompanied with compliments, M. de Sartines declared that he would range himself under our banner. Then I extended to him my hand in token of reconciliation; he took it with respect, and kissed it with gallantry. Up to this time we had conversed with feelings of restraint and standing; but now we seated ourselves, and begun a conference in form, as to the manner of preventing a recurrence of the offensive outrages against me. As a proof of good intention M. de Sartines told me the author of the two articles of which I complained. He was a wretch, named Ledoux, who for twelve hundred livres per annum wrote down all those who displeased the duchesse de Grammont. This lady had no fear of doing all that was necessary to remove every obstacle to the publication of such infamies.

After M. de Sartines had given us all the details which we desired, and after I had promised to reconcile him to his master, he went away delighted with having seen me. Believe me, my friend, it is necessary to be as handsome as I am, that is to say, as I was, to seduce a lieutenant of police.

CHAPTER VIII.

The sieur Ledoux—The *lettre de cachet*—The duc de la Vrillière—Madame de Langeac—M. de Maupeou—Louis XV.—The comte Jean.

On that very evening the king having come to me, I said to him,

« Sire, I have made acquaintance with M. de Sartines. »

« What! has he been to make friends with you? »

« Something like it: but he has appeared to me less culpable than I thought. He had only yielded to the solicitation of my personal enemy. »

« You cannot have one at my court, madame; the lieutenant of police would have done well not to have named her to you. »

« Thanks to him, however, I shall now know whom I ought to mistrust. I know also who is the author of the two scurrilous paragraphs. »

« Some scamp, no doubt; some beggarly scoundrel. »

« A monsieur Ledoux. »

« Ah, I know the fellow. His bad reputation has reached me. It must be stopped at last. »

So saying, Louis XV. went to the chimney, and pulled the bell-rope with so much vehemence that ten persons answered it at once.

« Send for the duc de la Vrillière; if he be not suitably attired let him come in his night-gown, no matter so that he appear quickly. »

On hearing an order given in this manner a stranger might have supposed the king crazy, and not intent on imprisoning a miserable libeller. I interceded in his favor, but Louis XV., delighted at an opportunity of playing the king at a small cost, told me that it was no person's business, and he would be dictated to by no one. I was silent, reserving myself until another opportunity when I could undertake the defence of the poor devil.

The duc de la Vrillière arrived, not in a dressing-gown, as the king had authorized, but in magnificent costume. He piqued himself on his expenditure, and always appeared superbly attired, altho the splendor of his apparel could not conceal the meanness of his look. He was the oldest secretary of state, and certainly was the least skilful, least esteemed, least considered. Some time after his death some one said of him in the presence of the duc d'Ayen, that he had been an unfortunate man, for he had been all his life the butt of public hatred and universal contempt. « Rather say, » replied the duke, « that he has been a fortunate man; for if justice had been rendered to him according to his deserts, he would have been hung at least a dozen times. »

The duc d'Ayen was right: M. de la Vrillière was a brazen-faced rogue; a complete thief, without dignity, character, or heart. His cupidity was boundless: the *lettres de cachet* emanated from his office, and he carried on an execrable trade in them. If any person wished to get rid of a father, brother, or husband, they only had to apply to M. de la Vrillière. He sold the king's signature to all who paid ready money for it. This man inspired me with an invincible horror and repugnance. For his part, as I was not disgusting, he contented himself with hating me; he was animated against me by his old and avaricious mistress, madame de Langeac, alias Subutin. Langeac could not endure me. She felt that it was better to be the mistress of Louis XV. than that of the *petit la Vrillière*, for so her lover was called at court. I knew that she was no friend of mine, and that her lover sided with the Choiseuls against me; and was consequently the more delighted to see the little scoundrel come to receive the order for avenging me. He entered with an air of embarrassment; and whilst he made me a salute as low as to the king, this latter, in a brief severe tone, ordered him to send the sieur Ledoux to Saint Lazare forthwith. He departed without reply, and half an hour afterwards returned, to say that it was done. The king then said to him,

« Do you know this lady ? »

« No, sire. »

« Well, I desire you henceforward to have the greatest consideration for her as my best friend, and whoever wishes to prove his zeal for me, will honor and cherish her. »

The king then invited him to sup with us, and I am sure that during the whole repast I was the hardest morsel he had to digest.

Some days afterwards I made acquaintance with a person much more important than the little duke, and destined to play a great part in the history of France. I mean M. de Maupeou, the late chancellor, who, in his disgrace, would not resign his charge. M. de Maupeou possessed one of those firm and superior minds, which, in spite of all obstacles, change the face of empires. Ardent, yet cool; bold, but reflective; the clamors of the populace did not astonish, nor did any obstacles arrest him. He went on in the direct path which his will chalked out. Quitting the magistracy, he became its most implacable enemy, and after a deadly combat he came off conqueror. He felt that the moment had arrived for freeing royalty from the chains which it had imposed on itself. It was necessary, he has said to me a hundred times, for the kings of France in past ages to have a popular power on which they could rely for the overturning of the feudal power. This power they found in the high magistracy; but since the reign of Louis XIII. the mission of the parliaments had finished, the nobility was reduced, and they became no less formidable than the enemy whom they had aided in subduing.

« Before fifty years, » pursued M. de Maupeou, « kings will be nothing in France, and parliaments will be everything. »

Talented, a good speaker, even eloquent, M. de Maupeou possessed qualities which made the greatest enterprises successful. He was convinced that all men have their price, and that it is only to find out the sum at which they are purchasable.* As brave personally as a maréchal of France, his enemies (and he had many) called him a coarse and quarrelsome man. Hated by all, he despised men in a body, and jeered at them individually; but little sensible to the charms of our sex, he only thought of us by freaks, and as a means of relaxation. This is M. de Maupeou, painted to the life. As for his person, you know it as well as I do. I have no need to tell you, that he was little, ugly, and his complexion was yellow, bordering upon green. It must be owned, however, that his face, full of thought and intelligence, fully compensated for all the rest.

You know how, as first president of the parliament of Paris, he succeeded his father as vice-chancellor. At the resignation of the titular M. de Lamoignon,† the elder Maupeou received his letters of nomination, and as soon as they were registered, he resigned in favor of his son. The Choiseuls had allowed the latter to be nominated, relying on finding him a creature. I soon saw that the Choiseuls were mistaken.

It was in the month of October, that Henriette, always my favorite, came to me with an air of unusual mystery, to say, that a black and ugly gentleman wished to see me; that on the usual reply that I was not visible, he had insisted, and sent, at the same time, a cautiously sealed note. I took it, opened, and read these words:—

> "The chancellor of France wishes to have the honor of presenting his respectful homage to madame la comtesse du Barry."

"Let him come in," I said to Henriette.

"I will lay a wager, madame, that he comes to ask some favor."

"I believe," replied I, "that he is more frequently the solicited than the solicitor."

Henriette went out, and in a few minutes led in, thro' the private corridors which communicated with my apartment, his highness monseigneur René Nicolas Charles Augustin de Maupeou, chevalier and chancellor of France. As soon as he entered I conceived a good opinion of him, altho' I had only seen him walk. His step was firm and assured, like that of a man confident in the resources of his own talents.

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* This gentleman would have been an able coadjutor for sir Robert Walpole.—Trans.

† In September, 1768.

« Madame la comtesse du Barry,» he said, « would have a right to complain of me, if I did not come and lay my person at her feet. I had the more impatience to express to her my devotion, as I feared she had been prejudiced against me.»

« How, monseigneur ? »

« The gate by which I entered the ministry — »

« Is not agreeable to me, as being that of my enemies, but I feel assured that you will not side with them against me.»

« Certainly not, madame; it is my wish to give you pleasure in every thing, and I flatter myself I may merit your friendship.»

After many other compliments, the Chancellor asked me, with much familiarity, when my presentation was to take place, and why it had not yet occurred. I replied, that the delay arose from the intrigues of Choiseul, and the king shrunk from the discontent of a handful of courtiers.

« I am sorry for it,» said M. de Maupeou; « in the first place, madame, because of the interest I take in you, and also because for his majesty, it would be a means of striking terror into the opposing party. You know, madame, how annoying parliaments are to all your friends, and with what bitterness those of Bretagne and Paris, at this moment, are pursuing the duc d'Aiguillon.»

« Do you think,» I replied with emotion, « that matters are unfavorable towards him ? »

« I hope not, but he must be warmly supported.»

« Ah! I will aid him with all my influence, He is no doubt innocent of the crimes imputed to him.»

« Yes, certainly. He has done no other wrong than to defend the authority of the crown against the enmity of the parliaments.»

We continued some time to talk of parliaments and parliament men: then we agreed that M. de Maupeou should see me again, accompanied by the duc d'Aiguillon, who should have the credit of presenting him, and he left me with as much mystery as he had entered.

When the king came to see me, I said to him, « I have made acquaintance with your chancellor: he is a very amiable man, and I hope that he will not conduct himself improperly towards me.»

« Where did you see him ? »

« Here, sire, and but a short time since.»

« He came then to visit you ? »

« Yes, in person, that he might obtain the favor of being permitted to pay his court to me.»

« Really what you tell me seems perfectly unaccountable. He has then burst from the hands of the Choiseuls ? It is amusing. Poor Choiseul, when soliciting for Maupeou, he most tremendously deceived himself.»

« At least, sire, you must own that he has given you no fool.»

« True. The chancellor is a man full of talents, and I do not doubt but that he will restore to my crown that power which circumstances have deprived it of. However, if you see him familiarly, advise him not to persuade me to extreme measures. I wish all should work for the best, without violent courses and without painful struggles.»

These last words proved to me the natural timidity of the king.

« I knew very well,» added the king, « that Maupeou would not prove a man for the Choiseuls. The main point is, that he should be mine, and I am content.»

Louis XV. was then satisfied with the chancellor, but he was not equally so with the comte Jean.

« I do not like,» said he to me, « your Du Barry monkey. He is a treacherous fellow, who has betrayed his party, and I hope some of these mornings we shall hear that the devil has wrung his neck.»

CHAPTER IX.

The king of Denmark — The courtesans of Paris — The duc de Choiseul and the bishop of Orleans — Witty repartees of the king of Denmark — His visit to madame du Barry — «The court of king Petaud,» a satire — Letter of the duc d'Aiguillon to Voltaire — The duchesse de Grammont mystified — Unpublished letter of Voltaire's.

FROM this moment, and in spite of all that comte Jean could say against it, a new counsellor was admitted to my confidence. He was the chancellor. The duc d'Aiguillon and he were on very good terms, and these two, with the abbé Teray, of whom I shall speak to you presently, formed a triumvirate, which governed France from the disgrace of M. de Choiseul to the death of the king. But before I enter upon a detail of those politics, of which you will find that I understand something, allow me to continue the history of my presentation, and also to give some account of Christian VII.

You know that his Danish majesty was expected with anything but pleasure by the king of France, and with curiosity by the rest of the nation. Men and women were impatient to see a king, under twenty years of age, who was traversing Europe with a design of attaining instruction. Married to a lovely woman, Caroline Mathilde, he had left her on the instant, without suspecting that this separation would prove fatal to both. At Paris, the real character of this prince was not known, but a confused report of his gallantry was spread abroad, on which all the courtesans of note in the city began to try all arts to please him, each hoping to attract him to herself, and dip into his strong box. M. de Sartines amused us one evening, the king and myself, by telling us of the plans of these ladies. Some were going to meet his Danish majesty, others were to await him at the barrier, and two of the most renowned, mesdemoiselles Gradi and Laprairie had their portraits painted, to send to the young monarch as soon as he should arrive.

Christian VII. entered Paris the latter end of the month of October, 1768. MM. de Duras complimented him in the king's name, and informed him that they were charged with the office of receiving his commands during his residence in Paris. The interview of the king and the illustrious stranger took place at Versailles. Christian VII. came thither in the state-carriage, and was conducted by the duc de Duras into the apartment of the dauphin, where he remained until Louis XV. was prepared to receive him. I had heard much discussion about this reception. It was said, that to make a distinction between the sovereign of a petty state and that of the superb kingdom of France, it was requisite that the former should await for some time the audience which the latter accorded. I am sure that when the peace with Frederick was agitated, the face of Louis XV. was not more grave and serious than during this puerile debate about etiquette.

The duc de Choiseul, who had the control of foreign affairs, was in the apartment to receive his Danish majesty, with his colleagues, the duc de Praslin, the comte de Saint-Florentin (whom I have called by anticipation duc de la Vrillière), M. Bertin, M. Mainon d'Invau, controller of the finances, and M. de Jarente, bishop of Orleans and one of the ministry. He kept himself somewhat in the background, as tho' from humility. The duc de Choiseul came up to him, and said, with a smile,

« Monseigneur, what brings you in contact with a heretic? »

« To watch for the moment of penitence.»

« But what will you do if it become necessary to teach him his *credo?* »

M. de Jarente understood the joke, and was the first to jest upon his own unepiscopal conduct, replying to the duc de Choiseul,

« There is a person present who knows it; he will whisper it to me, and, if necessary, the *Veni Creator* also.»

The king of Denmark was congratulated by the duc de Choiseul, who discharged this duty with as much grace as wit. Afterwards M. Desgranges, master of the ceremonies, having announced that Louis XV. was visible, the king of Denmark, preceded by his gentlemen and the French ministers and lords, went to the king's cabinet, in which two arm-chairs precisely alike were prepared, but his majesty of Denmark positively refused to be seated. He entered into conversation, and felicitated himself on seeing a monarch, whose renown filled Europe, and whom he should take as his model. During this conversation Christian VII. displayed the greatest amiability. Our king, speaking to him, said, « I am old enough to be your father »; to which he replied, « All my conduct towards you shall be that of a son.» This was thought admirable; and at the termination of the interview Louis XV. appeared charmed with his brother of Denmark. « He is a complete Frenchman,» said he to me, «and I should be sorry if he left me dissatisfied.»

That same evening Christian VII. visited monseigneur the dauphin, in whom he did not find the urbanity of his grandfather. The conversation was short and abridged out of regard to our prince, who only stammered, without being able to find one polished phrase. Never was there in his youth a more timid and awkwardly conducted prince than the present king. I shall mention him and his brothers hereafter, but will now direct my immediate attention to the king of Denmark. He supped the same evening with Louis XV. at a table with four and twenty ladies of the court, selected from amongst those most celebrated for the charms of their persons or their wit. As his Danish majesty was greatly struck with madame de Flaracourt, the king asked him how old the lady might be in his opinion.

« Thirty, perhaps,» was the reply.

«Thirty, brother! she is fifty.»

« Then age has no influence at your court.»

I shall not copy the « *Gazette de France*» to tell you of the sojourn of Christian VII. at Paris. I am not writing the journal of this prince but of myself. The king one day said to me,

« My brother of Denmark has expressed to the duc de Duras a great desire to pay his respects to you, if you will accede to his wishes. I leave you entirely sovereign mistress of yourself, not without some fear however that the young king will steal away your heart from me.»

« Ah, sire,» I replied, « that is an unjust suspicion; I should be angry about it if it were not a joke, and would refuse to see the king of Denmark did I not know how fully you are assured of my attachment to you.»

« I should not be so jealous, madame, if I did not set so much value on it,» was the reply of the king, as he kissed my hand.

The duc de Duras came the next day to inform me of the request of his new king. It was agreed, in order to keep the interview secret, that I should receive him at my own mansion in the Rue de la Jussienne, and that he should come there without suite, and with the strictest incognito. At the day and hour agreed he entered my house, escorting two strangers of admirable presence. One was the king of Denmark, under the name of comte de ——, and the other a nobleman of his suite. Christian VII. appeared to me a very handsome man. He had large and singularly expressive eyes; too much so, perhaps, for their brilliancy was not of good augury; and I was not surprised at hearing subsequently that his reason had abandoned him, altho' he possessed and exerted his wit most perfectly during our conversation, in which he displayed the greatest gallantry. I could not reproach him with one single expression that was objectionable, altho' the subject of conversation was delicate. He discoursed of the feelings of the king towards me, and yet said not a word that was unsuited or out of place, nothing but what was in the best taste, and expressed with the utmost delicacy. I asked him if the ladies of Denmark were handsome. « I thought, madame,» was his reply, « until now, that the ladies of my kingdom were the most lovely in Europe.»

We did not talk of myself only: Christian VII. spoke of Paris with enthusiasm. « It is the capital of the world,» he remarked, « and our states are but the provinces.» He sought out our most celebrated *savants* and *literati*, and was particularly delighted with d'Alembert, Diderot, la Harpe, and M. the comte de Buffon. He greatly regretted that Voltaire was not in Paris, and expressed his great desire to see at Ferney the great genius (as he termed him) who instructed and amused the world. He appeared weary of the fêtes which were given, and especially with the deadly-lively company of the two Duras. It was enough to kill you to have only one of them, and you may imagine the torture of being bored with both. The duke had promised Louis XV. to be as amusing as possible too! After a conversation of three hours, which his majesty (of course) said had appeared but of a moment, he left me delighted with his person, wit, and manners.

When Louis XV. saw me, he inquired my opinion of his Danish majesty.

« He is,» I replied, « a well-educated king, and that they say is a rarity.»

« True,» said Louis XV., « there are so many persons who are interested in our ignorance, that it is a miracle if we escape out of their hands as reasonable beings.»

I went on to tell the king our conversation.

« Ah,» cried he, « here is one who will increase the vanity of the literary tribe: they want it, certainly. All these wits are our natural born enemies; and think themselves above us; and the more we honor them, the greater right do they assume to censure and despise us.»

This was the usual burden of his song: he hated men of learning. Voltaire especially was his detestation, on account of the numerous epigrams which this great man had written against him; and Voltaire had just given fresh subject of offence by publishing « *La Cour du Roi Petaud* » (« The Court of the King Petaud,») a satire evidently directed as strongly against the king as your humble servant. M. de Voltaire had doubtless been encouraged to write this libel by the Choiseul party. He was at a distance, judged unfavorably of me, and thought he could scourge me without compromising himself.

It was comte Jean who brought me these verses, in which there was less poetry than malevolence. I read them, was indignant, and wept. The duc d'Aiguillon came, and finding me in tears, inquired the cause.

« Here, » said I, giving him the poem, « see if you can bear so gross an insult. » He took the paper, cast his eyes over it, and having folded it up, put it into his pocket.

« It was ill done, » said he, « to show this to you. I knew of it yesterday, and came now to talk with you of it. »

« I rely on you to do me justice. »

« *Miséricorde!* » cried the duke, « would you lose yourself in the eyes of all France? You would place yourself in a fine situation by declaring yourself the persecutrix of Voltaire. Only an enemy could have thus advised you. »

« That enemy was comte Jean. »

« Then your imprudence equals your zeal. Do you not perceive the advantage it would give to your adversaries were we to act in this manner? To the hatred of the court would be united that of the *literati*, women, and young persons. Voltaire is a god, who is not to be smitten without sacrilege. »

« Must I then tamely submit to be beaten? »

« Yes, for the moment. But it will not last long: I have just written this letter to M. de Voltaire, that peace may be made between you:—

« SIR,—The superiority of your genius places you amongst the number of the potentates of Europe. Every one desires, not only to be at peace with you, but even, if it be possible, to obtain your esteem. I flatter myself with being included in the ranks of your admirers; my uncle has spoken to you many times of my attachment to your person, and I embrace the opportunity of proving this by a means that now presents itself.

« Persons in whom you place too much confidence have spread abroad, under your name, copies of a poem, entitled '*La Cour du Roi Petaud.*' In this, wherein insult is cast on a personage who should be exempt from such offence, is also outraged, in a most indecent way, a lovely female, whom you would adore as we do, if you had the happiness to know her. Is it for the poet of the lover of Gabrielle to carry desolation into the kingdom of the Graces?

«Your correspondents use you ill by leaving you in ignorance, that this young person has immense favor here; that we are all at her feet; that she is all powerful, and her anger is to be particularly avoided. She is the more to be propitiated, as yesterday, in presence of a certain person whom your verses had greatly irritated, she took up your defence with as much grace as generosity. You see, sir, that you ought not to be on bad terms with her.

«My uncle allows me to see, as one of the initiated, what you call your scraps, which are delicious feasts to us. I read them to the lady in question, who takes great delight in reciting, or hearing others recite, your verses, and she begs you will send her some as a proof of your repentance. Under these circumstances, if your bellicose disposition urges you on to war, we hope, before you continue it, that you will loyally and frankly declare it.

«In conclusion, be assured that I shall defend you to my utmost, and am for life, «Yours, etc.»

Whilst we were awaiting Voltaire's reply, I determined to avenge myself on the duchesse de Grammont, who had encouraged him in his attack; and thus did I serve this lady. Persuaded that she did not know the writing of his Danish majesty, I wrote the following letter to her: —

« Madame la Duchesse,— I have struggled to this time to avoid confessing to you how I am subdued. Happy should I be could I throw myself at your feet. My rank alone must excuse my boldness. Nothing would equal my joy if this evening, at the theatre at madame de Villeroi's, you would appear with blue feathers in your head-dress. I do not add my name; it is one of those which should not be found at the bottom of a declaration of love.»

In spite of all her penetration, the duchesse de Grammont did not perceive, in the emphatic tone of this letter, that it was a trick. Her self-love made her believe that a woman of more than forty could be pleasing to a king not yet twenty. She actually went in the evening to madame de Villeroi's dressed in blue, with a blue plumed head-dress. She was placed next to his Danish majesty. Christian VII. addressed her in most courteous terms, but not one word of love.

The duchesse imagining that the prince was timid, looked at him with eyes of tenderness, and endeavored to attract and encourage him by all means she could devise, but the monarch did not understand her. The duchesse then addressed a few words, which she hoped would lead to an explanation, but, to her dismay, his majesty did not appear to understand her. Madame de Grammont was furious at this affair. The duc d'Aiguillon, who was close to her, had seen all, heard all, and related particulars to me. The same day I told the king of my trick and its success. He laughed excessively, and then scolded me for at all compromising his Danish majesty. «How, sire?» was my reply. «I did not sign his name; I have not forged his signature. The vanity of the duchesse has alone caused all the ridiculous portion of this joke. So much the worse for her if she did not succeed.»

I did not, however, limit my revenge to this. A second letter, in the same hand, was addressed to my luckless enemy. This time she was informed that she had been made a butt of, and mystified. I learned from M. de Sartines, who, after our compact, gave me details of all, the methods she had pursued to detect the author of these two epistles, and put a termination to all these inquiries, by denouncing myself to M. de Sartines; who then gave such a turn to the whole matter, that the duchesse could never arrive at the truth.

Voltaire, in the meantime, was not slow in reply; and as I imagine that you will not be sorry to read his letter, I transcribe it for you:—

«MONSIEUR LE DUC,—I am a lost, destroyed man. If I had strength enough to fly, I do not know where I should find courage to take refuge. I! Good God! I am suspected of having attacked that which, in common with all France, I respect! When there only remains to me the smallest power of utterance, but enough to chant a *De profundis*, that I should employ it in howling at the most lovely and amiable of females! Believe me, monsieur le duc, that it is not at the moment when a man is about to render up his soul, that a man of my good feeling would outrage the divinity whom he adores.

«No, I am not the author of the «*Cour du Roi Petaud.*» The verses of this rhapsody are not worth much, it is true; but indeed they are not mine: they are too miserable, and of too bad a style. All the vile trash spread abroad in my name, all those pamphlets without talent, make me lose my senses, and now I have scarcely enough left to defend myself with. It is on you, monsieur le duc, that I rely; do not refuse to be the advocate of an unfortunate man unjustly accused. Condescend to say to this young lady, that I have been before embroiled with madame de Pompadour, for whom I professed the highest esteem; tell her, that at the present day especially, the favorite of Cæsar is sacred for me; that my heart and pen are hers, and that I only aspire to live and die under her banner.

«As to the scraps you ask for, I have not at this moment any suitable. Only the best viands are served up at the table of the goddesses. If I had any I would present them to the person of whom you speak to me. Assure her, that one day the greatest merit of my verses will be to have them recited by her lips; and entreat her, until she bestows immortality on me, to permit me to prostrate myself at her beautiful feet.

«I will not conclude my letter, monsieur le duc, without thanking you a thousand times for the advice you have given me. This proof of your kindness will, if possible augment the sincere attachment I bear to you. I salute you with profound respect.»

As it is bold to hold the pen after having transcribed anything of M. de Voltaire's, I leave off here for to-day.

CHAPTER X.

When is the presentation to take place?—Conversation on this subject with the king—M. de Maupeou and M. de la Vauguyon—Conversation on the same subject with the king and the duc de Richelieu—M. de la Vrillière—M. Bertin—Louis XV. and the comtesse—The king's promise—The fire-works, an anecdote—The Marquise de Castellane—M. de Maupeou at the duc de Choiseul's—The duchesse de Grammont.

In spite of the love of the duchesse de Grammont, the king of Denmark departed at last. Louis XV. having resumed his former habits, I began to meditate seriously on my presentation; and my friends employed themselves to the utmost in furthering my desires and insuring my triumph.

The chancellor, who each day became more attached to my interests, opened the campaign. One day, when the king was in a rage with the parliaments, the chancellor seized the opportunity to tell him that the cabal, who were opposed to my presentation, testified so much resistance, under the idea, and in the hope, that they would be supported by the parliaments of Paris.

« If your majesty, » added the chancellor, « had less condescension towards these malcontents, they would fear your authority more. »

« You will see, » replied the king, « that it will be their audacity which will urge me on to a step, which otherwise I should wish to avoid. »

Whilst the hatred which M. de Maupeou bore towards the parliaments served me in this way, the love of M. de la Vauguyon for the Jesuits turned to even more advantage. The good duke incessantly talked to me of his dear Jesuits; and I as constantly replied, that my influence would not be salutary until after my presentation,

M. de la Vauguyon had sense enough to perceive the embarrassment of my situation, and saw that before I could think of others I must think of myself. Having taken «sweet counsel» with the powerful heads of his company, he freely gave me all his influence with the king.

Fortune sent me an auxiliary not less influential than these two gentlemen; I mean the maréchal duc de Richelieu. In the month of January, 1769, he returned from his government of Guienne to enter on service. He had much credit with the king, and this (would you believe it?) resulted from his reputation as a man of intrigue. He told the king every thing that came into his head: he told him one day, that the Choiseuls boasted that he, the king of France, never dared introduce his mistress into the state apartments at Versailles.

«Yes,» added the duke, «they boast so loudly, that nothing else is talked of in the province; and at Bordeaux, for instance, there is one merchant who, on the strength of the enemies of the comtesse, has made a bet that she will never be presented.»

«And why do you not imprison these persons?» inquired the king, angrily.

«Because, sire, it appears to me injustice to punish the echo of the fooleries of Paris.»

«I will conduct myself as regards the presentation of madame du Barry in the manner which I think best. But is it not an inconceivable contrariety, that one party should wish it with the utmost desire, and another place every obstacle in the way? In truth, I am very unfortunate, and a cruel tyranny is exercised over me.»

The duc de Richelieu, not wishing to appear as one of the tyrants of the king, gave a different turn to the conversation.

My presentation was, however, a matter of first-rate importance to me and to my partizans, and the duc de la Vrillière was gained over to my side, by making him believe that the king would yield to my desires, and that then I should remember all those who opposed my elevation. The duc d'Aiguillon also drew over to my party

M. Bertin, who bore no love to the Choiseuls, and who saw that the preponderance of interest was on my side of the scale. When I was assured of a considerable number of defenders, I thought I might venture on the master stroke, and thus I went to work.

One evening the king was with me, and the MM. de Maupeou and de Richelieu were there also. We were discoursing of different things, and the king was perfectly tranquillized, little anticipating the scene that was in store for him. I rose suddenly from my arm-chair, and going up to his majesty, after a profound courtesy cast myself at his feet. Louis XV. would have raised me, but I said,

« No, I will remain where I am until you have accorded me the favor I ask. »

« If you remain in this posture I shall place myself in a similar one. »

« Well, then, since you will not have me at your knees I will place myself on them »; and I seated myself in his lap without ceremony.

« Listen to me, sire, » I said, « and repeat what I say to the king of France word for word. He must authorize my presentation; for else, some fine day, in the presence of the whole court, I will go to the state apartments, and try whether I shall be repulsed at the door. »

« Will she have the boldness? » inquired the king to the chancellor.

« I have no doubt of it, sire. A female, young, beautiful, honored with your kindness, may venture to do anything. »

« Is it not distressing to me, » I added, « that, graced with your majesty's favors, I remain thus concealed, whilst women whom you detest annoy you with their presence. »

« Madame is right, » replied the duc de Richelieu, « and I see that you look for her every evening where she is not, and where she ought to be. »

« What! you too, duc de Richelieu, do you join the cry of the chancellor? »

« I would tear out the eyes of these gentlemen, » I added, « if they thought differently from me. »

« Oh, » said the king, laughing, « this punishment would not be one for M. Maupeou: justice ought to be blind: and as for you, M. de Richelieu, you have your *baton* left. »

« Which he has nobly gained, » I replied, « by fighting against your majesty's enemies, and of which he still continues worthy, by now defending me from my foes. »

« This rebellion, » said the king, « cannot last, and I see myself compelled to hold a *lit de justice* (a judicial sitting or bed). »

« And I swear to you, that I will receive nobody into mine until I have been presented. »

This sally amused the king, who said, « Well, since it must be so, you shall be presented. »

At this I leaped on the king's neck, giving a cry which might have been heard by my rivals. After that, I advanced to the two gentlemen who had advocated my cause so well, extending a hand to each, which they took and kissed with great gallantry.

Louis XV. became thoughtful, and continued to mutter between his teeth, « I wash my hands of it — they will cry out, they will clamor, but it must be so. » I saw the feelings of the king, and took care not to allow him to go away in this state. Whilst I sought to compose him by my caresses, the duc de Richelieu told us one of his thousand and one adventures, which he told so well. I know not if it will please you, but such as it is I shall give you an abridgment of it.

« I was, you know, » he began, « a very good-looking, a very wild fellow: women have no objection to this. I was travelling, and in my way thro' D ——, M., the intendant of the city, insisted on my taking up my abode at his house. His lady added her entreaties, and I consented. I must tell you that the lady was handsome. I had passed the night with her; but when, on the next morning, as I sought to go out of her apartment, I found the outer door double locked and bolted. I looked round me on all sides, but found no egress. Whilst I was lamenting this with the lady's *femme-de-chambre*, who was nearly as much distressed as her mistress, I saw in a detached closet a great many machines covered with paper, and all of different shapes. On inquiry, I was informed that the following Monday was the lady's birthday, which they were to celebrate with fireworks. I looked at the beautiful fusees, and brilliant suns with much admiration. Suddenly, thinking of the lady's honor which might be compromised, I took a light and set fire to a Roman candle; in a moment the whole was in flames, and everybody took alarm. Great was the consternation in the house, which was turned out of windows; and in the uproar, the house-door being broken open, a crowd of persons rushed in; I ran this way and that way; everybody admired and praised my exertions. I was compelled to quit the house at last, and ordered my carriage, whilst M. the intendant was thanking me for the vast service I had rendered him. I assure you, sire, that I never laughed more heartily."

This tale amused the king, and M. de Richelieu assured him that he had never told it before. A thousand considerations had induced him to keep it to himself until the present time. «But now,» said he, «the third generation of madame l'intendante is no longer young, and I have no fear of being called out to fight a duel.»*

Next day there was a general rumor of my presentation. My friends asserted that I had the king's promise. This was imprudent on their part, and they injured my interest whilst they flattered my vanity. They put the Choiseul cabal to work, who intrigued so well that not a person could be found who would perform the office of introductress. You know the custom: the presentation is effected by the intermediation of another lady, who conducts the person to be presented to the princesses, and introduces her. This custom had passed into a law, and it would have been too humiliating to me to have dispensed with it.

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*The duc de Richelieu preserved his coolness and talent at repartee in the most trivial circumstances. The story is well known of the man who came to ask for his aid, saying they were related. «How?» asked the duke. «Sir, by Adam.» «Give this man a penny,» said the duke, turning to a gentleman of his train; «and if all of his relations give him as much he will soon be a richer man than I am.»

If our readers will turn to «Joe Miller,» page 45, they will find this jest attributed to the witty duke of Buckingham. It is a very good joke for a duke, but savors more of a desire to be witty than to be charitable.

This was a dire blow for me: it distressed me sadly, and I wept over it with my friends. The duc de Richelieu said to me,

"With money and promises everything can be managed at court. There is no place where they know better how to value complaisance, and the price at which it is sold. Do not give yourself any uneasiness; we shall find the lady we want."

And we did find her, but her compliance was dearly bought. Two ladies who were applied to stipulated for most outrageous conditions. One, the marquise de Castellane, consented to present me, but demanded that she should be created a duchess, and have a gift of five hundred thousand livres: the other, whose name I forget, asked for her husband the order of the Holy Ghost and a government, a regiment for her son, and for herself I forget what. These ladies seemed to think, like Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, that governments and five hundred thousand livres were to be picked up on the highway. In truth, they spoke out without disguise.

At this juncture the chancellor had a singular conversation concerning me with the Choiseuls. He had been one morning to call on the duke, and whilst they were discoursing, the duchesse de Grammont came into her brother's apartment, and entered at once into conversation.

"Ah, my lord, I am glad to see you. Your new friends carry you off from your old ones. You are wrong to adore the rising sun."

"That was the idolatry of a great number of persons: but I beg of you to be so very kind as not to speak to me in figures, if you would wish me to understand you."

"Oh, you play off the ignorant. You know as well as I do what I mean, and your daily visits to this *fille*."

"Which, madame? There are so many at court!"

This sarcastic reply made the brother and sister smile; both of them being fully competent to understand the merit of an epigram. The duke fearing lest the duchess should go too far, judging by what she had already said, thus addressed him:

"You are, then, one of the adorers of the comtesse du Barry?"

"Yes, monsieur le duc; and would to God that, for your own interest, you would be so too!"

"My brother set foot in the house of this creature!"

"Why not, madame? We see good company there; the prince de Soubise, the ducs de la Trimouille, de la Vauguyon, Duras, Richelieu, d'Aiguillon, and many others, not to mention the king of France. A gentleman may be seen in such company without any disgrace."

"Monsieur le chevalier," replied the duke, "to speak candidly to you, allow me to ask, if any one who would have the friendship of our house would be seen in that of the lady in question?"

"Pardon me, duke; that is not the question. Allow me, in turn, to ask you, why those of your house should not go there? This, I think, is the real question."

"You offer us a splendid alliance!" said the duchesse with anger.

"I offer nothing, madame: I only inquire. For my part, I see no legitimate motive for this proscription of madame du Barry."

"A woman without character!"

"Character! Why, madame, who has any in these days? M. de Crebillon the younger would be at a loss to tell us where to find it."

This reply made the duke and his sister smile again. The chancellor went on thus:

"It appears to me that persons were less difficult in the times of madame de Pompadour."

"But a creature who has been so low in society!"

"Have you seen her so, madame? And supposing it has been the case, do we interdict all ladies of conduct not less blamable from an introduction at court. How many can you enumerate, madame, who have led a life much more scandalous? Let us count them on our fingers. First, the maréchale de Luxembourg, one; then —"

"Then the comtesse de Choiseul, my sister-in-law," added the duke; "we know it as well as you, sir. But this is not the matter in question. You are not ignorant that our enemies surround this madame du Barry; and it is of your alliance with them that I complain."

"You see everything with a jaundiced eye, monsieur le duc. But if you fear the influence of this lady with the king, why do you not present yourself at her apartments? She would be delighted to receive you."

"No, no!" cried the duchess, "my brother will never present himself to such a creature. If he would degrade himself so low, I would never forgive him as long as I live. Since you show your gratitude for what has been done for you by leaguing yourself with this woman, tell her from me that I detest her, and that I will never rest until I have sent her back again to her dunghill."

"Madame," replied the chancellor, "I will evince my gratitude to the duke by not delivering such a message"; and the chancellor went out.

M. de Maupeou came to tell me the whole of this conversation, which *Chon* wrote down under his dictation, that I might show it to the king. You will see in my next letter what resulted from all this, and how the ill-timed enmity of the Choiseuls served my interests most materially.

CHAPTER XI.

A word concerning the duchesse de Choiseul — The apartment of the comte de Noailles — The Noailles — Intrigues for the presentation — The comte de Bearn — M. Morand once more — Visit of the comtesse Bearn to the comtesse du Barry — Conversation — Interested complaisance — The king and the comtesse du Barry — Dispute and reconciliation.

I SHOWED the king this conversation, in which I had been so shamefully vilified by the duchesse de Grammont. Louis XV. was very much inclined to testify his disapprobation to this lady, but was withheld by the consideration he felt for the duke and (particularly) the duchesse de Choiseul. This latter lady was not beloved by her husband, but her noble qualities, her good heart, made her an object of adoration to the whole court. You could not speak to any person of madame de Choiseul without hearing an eulogium in reply. The king himself was full of respect towards her; so much so, that, on the disgrace of the duke, he in some sort asked her pardon for the chagrin which he had caused her. Good conduct is no claim to advancement at court, but it procures the esteem of the courtiers. Remember, my friend, this moral maxim: there is not one of greater truth in my whole journal.

The king, unable to interpose his authority in a woman's quarrel, was yet determined on giving a striking proof of the attachment he bore to me. I had up to this period occupied Lebel's apartments in the château: it was not befitting my station, and the king thought he would give me those of madame de Pompadour, to which I had some claim. This apartment was now occupied by the comte de Noailles, governor of the château, who, as great a fool as the rest of his family, began to exclaim most lustily when the king's will was communicated to him. He came to his majesty complaining and lamenting. The king listened very quietly to his list of grievances; and when he had moaned and groaned out his dolorous tale, his majesty said to him,

« My dear count, who built the château of Versailles ? »

« Why, sire, your illustrious grandfather. »

« Well, then, as I am at home, I mean to be master. You may establish the seat of your government where you will; but in two hours the place must be free. I am in earnest. »

The comte de Noailles departed much disconcerted, took away his furniture, and the same evening I installed myself in the apartments. You must think that this was a fresh cause of chagrin, and created me more enemies. There are certain families who look upon the court as their hereditary domain: the Noailles was one of them. However, there is no grounds of pretension to such a right. Their family took its rise from a certain Adhemar de Noailles, *capitoul* of Toulouse, ennobled, according to all appearance, by the exercise of his charge in 1459. The grandfather of these Noailles was a domestic of M. de Turenne's, and his family was patronized at court by madame de Maintenon. Everybody knows this. But to return to my presentation.

M. de Maupeou, whose good services I can never sufficiently vaunt, came to me one day, and said, « I think that I have found a lady *presenteuse*. I have a dame of quality who will do what we want. »

« Who is it ? » said I, with joy.

« A comtesse d'Escarbagnas, a litigious lady, with much ambition and avarice. You must see her, talk with her, and understand each other. »

« But where can we see her ? »

« That is easy enough. She claims from the house of Saluces a property of three hundred thousand livres: she is very greedy for money. Send some one to her, who shall whisper in her ear that I see you often, and that your protection can serve her greatly in her lawsuit: she will come to you post haste. »

I approved the counsel of the chancellor; and, in concert with comte Jean, I once again made use of the ministry of the good M. Morand, whom I had recompensed largely for his good and loyal services. This was, however, the last he ever rendered me; for I learned some months after my presentation that he had died of indigestion: a death worthy of such a life and such a man.

M. Morand, after having found out the attorney of madame the comtesse de Bearn, went to him under some pretext, and then boasted of my vast influence with the chancellor. The lawyer, to whom madame de Bearn was to pay a visit on that very day, did not fail to repeat what M. Morand had told him. The next day the comtesse, like a true litigant, called upon him: she related her affair to him, and begged him to use his interest with me.

« I would do it with pleasure, » said the worthy, « if I did not think it better that you should see the comtesse du Barry yourself. I can assure you that she will be delighted to aid you. »

Madame de Bearn then came to me with M. Morand. Gracious heavens! how simple we were to take so much pains with this lady: had we known her better we should not have been so long in coming to the point. Scarcely any thing was said at this first visit: I contented myself with assuring her of my good will. On the same day the vicomte Adolphe du Barry told his father that the young de Bearn had asked him the evening before, if I had found a *stepmother* to present me; that in case I had not, his mother would not refuse such a service, should it be desired by the king. Comte Jean and I perfectly understood the lady. She came again, and I renewed the expression of my desire to be useful to her. She replied in a hackneyed phrase, that she should be charmed to prove her gratitude to me. I took her word.

« Madame, » said I to her, « you cannot be ignorant that I ardently desire to be presented. My husband has sent in his proofs of nobility, which have been received; I now only want a *marraine* (godmother); if you will officiate in that capacity, I shall owe you a debt of gratitude all my life. »

« Madame, I am at the king's orders. »

« But, madame, the king has nothing to do with this. I wish to be presented; will you be my introductress ? »

« Madame, the first wish of my heart is to be agreeable to you; I only desire that the king indicate in some way, no matter how trifling, his will on this point. »

« Well, then, » I exclaimed, with impatience, « I see you will not give me a direct reply. Why should you wish the king to interfere in what does not concern him ? Is it your intention to oblige me; yes or no ? »

« Yes, madame, certainly; but you must be aware of the tremendous cabal which is raised against you. Can I contend against it alone, and who will sustain me thro' it ? »

« I will to the full extent of my power as long as I am here, and the king will always do so. I can assure you, that he will be grateful for your exertions in my behalf. »

« I should like to have half a line from his majesty as a protection and assurance. »

« And that you will not get. The king's signature must not be compromised in this affair, and I do not think I ought to ask for it; let us therefore, madame, cease this discourse, since you ask such terms for your complaisance. »

The comtesse de Bearn rose; I did the same; and we parted mutually dissatisfied with each other.

My friends, my brother-in-law, and his sisters, impatiently awaited the result of my conversation with madame de Bearn. I told them all that had passed; giving my opinion of this lady as I thought her — a malicious provoking creature.

« How soon you torment yourself, » said the chancellor to me. « Do you not see that this woman wants a price to be bidden for her ? She is yours, body and soul, but first of all she must be paid. »

« Let that be no obstacle, » said comte Jean, « we will give her money, but present us she must. »

On this it was decided, that, on the following morning, my brother-in-law should go to Paris to find M. Morand, and get him to undertake the arrangement.

The next day my brother-in-law went to M. Morand's, and when he had disclosed his message concerning the comtesse, the good Morand began to laugh. He told the count, that the previous evening this lady had sent for him; and, on going to her house, madame de Bearn, as a set-off against the inconveniences which might result to her from being the instrument of my presentation, had stipulated for certain compensations; such, for instance, as a sum of two hundred thousand livres, a written promise of a regiment for her son, and for herself an appointment in the establishment of the future *dauphine*. This was the point aimed at by all the ambitious courtiers. Comte Jean thought these conditions preposterous. He had a *carte blanche* from me, and desired M. Morand to offer the lady one hundred thousand livres, and to add an assurance that the king should be importuned to place young Bearn advantageously, and to station the mother to her wishes; and thereupon my brother-in-law returned to Versailles.

The comte Jean had scarcely returned an hour, when we received a letter from M. Morand, stating, that he had gone, in consequence of the instructions of comte Jean, to the comtesse de Bearn; that he had found the lady pliant enough on the first point, and disposed to content herself with the half of the sum originally demanded; that on point the second, I mean the appointments of herself and son, she would come to no compromise, and stuck hard and fast to the written promise of the king; that he, Morand, thought this an obstacle not to be overcome unless we subscribed to her wishes. This letter put me in an excessively ill-humor. I saw my presentation deferred till doom's day, or, at least, adjourned *sine die*. I questioned my friends: the unanimous advice was that I ought to mention it to the king at one of his evening visits; and I determined to do so without loss of time.

When his majesty came I received him very graciously, and then said to him,

« Congratulate me, sire; I have found my godmother. »

« Ah, so much the better. » (I know that, at the bottom of his heart, he said « so much the *worse.* »)

« And who, » asked the king, with impatience, « may the lady be? »

« Madame de Bearn, a lady of quality in her own right, and of high nobility on her husband's side. »

« Yes, he was a *garde du corps*, and the son has just left the pages. Ah! she will present you then. That's well; I shall feel favored by her. »

« Would it not be best, sire, to tell her so yourself? »

« Yes, yes, certainly; but after the ceremony. »

« And why not previously? »

« Why? because I do not wish to appear to have forced your presentation. »

« Well, then, » I replied, striking the floor with my foot, « you will not do for me what you would do for a woman who is a complete stranger to you. Many thanks for your excessive kindness. »

« Well, well, do not scold. Anger does not become you. »

« No more than this indifference suits you; it is cruel. If you recede from saying a word, what will you do when I tell you of the conditions of madame de Bearn? »

« What does the good comtesse ask for? »

« Things past conception. »

« What? »

« She has stipulations unlimited. »

« But what are they then? »

« A hundred thousand livres for herself. »

« What, only that? We will grant so much. »

« Then a regiment for her son. »

« Oh, he is the wood they make colonels of, and if he behave well — »

« But then! She wishes to be annexed in some station or other to the household of the future *dauphine.* »

« Oh, that is impossible: all the selections have been made: but we will make an equivalent by placing one of her family about the person of one of the princes, my grandson. Is this all? »

"Yes, sire, that is all, with one small formality excepted. This lady, who is one of much punctilio, only considers *written* engagements as binding. She wishes for one word in your majesty's hand-writing—"

"A most impertinent woman!" cried the king, walking with rapid strides up and down my room.—"She has dared not to believe me on my word! Writing!—a signature! She mistrusts me as she would the lowest scribbler of France. A writing! My signature! My grandfather, Louis XIV., repented having given his to Charost. I will not commit a similar error."

"But, sire, when a prince has a real desire to keep his word, it is of little import whether he gives it in writing."

At these words, Louis XV. frowned sternly, but as he had the best sense in the world, he saw that he was wrong; and having no reply to make, he determined to flee away. I ran after him, and taking him by the arm, he said, with assumed anger, which did not deceive me:—

"Leave me, madame, you have offended my honor."

"Well, then, monsieur la France," replied I, assuming also a scolding tone, "I will give you satisfaction. Choose your time, weapons, and place; I will meet you, and we shall see whether you have courage to kill a woman who lives for you only, and whom you render the most miserable creature in existence."

Louis XV. gave me a kiss, and laughingly said, "I ought to make you sleep in the Bastille to-night."

"I am then more merciful than you, for I think I shall make you sleep in the couch you love best."

This reply amused the king excessively, and he himself proposed to send for madame de Bearn. I should speak of my presentation before him, and then without making any positive concession, he would see what could be done to satisfy her.

For want of any other, I accepted this *mezzo termine.*

CHAPTER XII.

The comtesse de Bearn — The supper — Louis XV. — Intrigues against my presentation — M. de Roquelaure — The scalded foot — The comtesse d'Aloigny — The duc d'Aiguillon and madame de Bearn — Anger of the king's daughters — Madame Adelaide and the comtesse du Barry — Dissatisfaction of the king.

M. Morand was again put in requisition, and went from me to ask madame de Bearn to come and sup at my apartments. We were in committee — my sisters-in-law, myself, and comte Jean. The comtesse made some difficulties at first, under pretence that she was afraid to refuse me a second time. Our messenger assured her by saying, that a supper would not bind her to any thing, and that she should still be at liberty to give any reply she pleased. Madame de Bearn allowed herself to be persuaded, and sent me word that she would accept my invitation. She would have reflected twice before she so far committed herself, had she at all suspected the turn we meant to serve her. But I saw by the wording of her note, that she still hoped that the king would be induced to grant me the written promise which I asked for her.

She came. I received her with all possible courtesy, and yet not with much heartiness. I could not help remembering the vexatious terms she set upon her complaisance. However, the supper was gay enough, comte Jean and my sisters-in-law, who knew very well how to dissemble, did the honors in a most agreeable way. On leaving table we went into the drawing-room, and then began to discuss the serious question which had brought us together. At the first words which comte Jean uttered, madame de Bearn, taking my hands with a respectful familiarity, said to me: —

« I hope, madame, that you will not have a bad opinion of me, if I put such conditions to my desire of obliging you. The situation of my family requires it, but it is only a trifle for the king to grant.»

« Much more than you imagine, madame,» I replied. « The king does not care to involve himself in such engagements. He does not like, moreover, that his sacred word should be doubted.»

« Ah ?» replied the cunning creature, « heaven forbid that I should not blindly trust to the king's word, but his memory may fail, or he, like other men, may forget.»

« Madame,» replied comte Jean, with the utmost gravity, « madame is a lady as full of prudence as of kindness, but yet a little too exacting. Madame wishes to have a promise signed for herself and son: that is too much. Why does she not content herself in dividing the difficulty, by satisfying herself with a verbal promise for what concerns herself, and with a written engagement for what relates to her son ?»

« *Mon Dieu, monsieur,*» replied the countess, « I am anxious to arrange all to our mutual satisfaction. But his majesty would not surely refuse the entreaties of madame for what I ask.»

« I will speak to him of it the first time I see him.»

« Oh, you are a charming woman. You will obtain all from the king, and make a sure friend — »

« Whose friendship is very difficult to acquire,» said I, interrupting her.

The countess would have replied to this, when my first *valet-de-chambre*, opening the two folding-doors of the room, announced the king.

At this unexpected name my guest trembled, and in spite of the thick rouge which covered her cheeks, I perceived she turned pale. She then saw the scene we had prepared for her: she wished herself a hundred leagues off: but she could do nothing, but remain where she was. I took her by the hand, all trembling as she was, and presented her to the king, saying,

« Sire, I now do for this lady, in my own drawing-room, what she will have the kindness to do for me at the state-chamber."

"Ah," replied the king, "is it madame de Bearn that you present to me? I am indeed delighted. Her husband was one of my faithful servants: I was much pleased with her son when he was one of pages, and I perceive that she herself is desirous of testifying to me her attachment to my person. I thank you, madame; you cannot confer a greater favor on me, and I shall embrace every opportunity of proving to you how much satisfaction your conduct affords me."

Each word that the king uttered went to the heart of the countess. However, making a virtue of necessity, she replied, that she was proud and happy at what the king had said to her, and that it would be her constant aim to please his majesty, flattering herself that the king would remember the services of the Bearn family, and would think of her in the dispensation of his bounties.

"You may rely on it, madame," replied Louis XV., "especially if the comtesse du Barry applies to me in your behalf."

Then, turning towards me, "When, then, is this redoubtable presentation to take place?"

"On the day, sire, when your majesty shall think proper," I replied.

"Well! I will send the duc de Richelieu to you, who will arrange the whole."

This settled, the subject was turned, but madame de Bearn lost her tongue entirely. In spite of all her endeavors, her forehead became contracted every moment, and I am sure she went away vexed and disappointed.

The following morning, the comte Jean and my sister-in-law went to her house. They testified their regret for what had occurred the previous evening; they assured her that we would not take any advantage of the conditionless engagement which she had made to present me, and that altho' it was impossible to ask the required guarantees from the king, still we should most undeviatingly adhere to the clauses of the treaty: they added, that they came to enquire when she should choose to receive the hundred thousand livres. The countess replied, that in spite of the real disadvantage which she must henceforward labor under in this affair, she felt great friendship for me, and would not refuse to oblige me, and she flattered herself that I would espouse her cause with the king. The comte Jean assured her of this, and settled with her the period of the payment of the hundred thousand livres, which were to be paid at sight on her drawing on M. de la Borde, the court-banker.

Thus then my presentation was an assured matter: nothing now could prevent it, at least I fancied so to myself. I reckoned without my host; I did not know yet all the malice of a courtier lady or gentleman. As it was, however, M. de Choiseul and his vile sister had gained over one of my servants, for they knew all that had passed. They soon learned that madame de Bearn had come to supper with me, and that after supper a visit of the king's had decided this lady on my presentation: this they determined to prevent.

For this end, they despatched as ambassador the chevalier de Coigny to the house of madame de Bearn. He, following the instruction, sought by turns to seduce and intimidate the countess, but all went for nothing. Madame de Bearn told the chevalier de Coigny, that she had been with me to ask my influence with the chancellor. The chevalier left her without being able to obtain any other information.

This bad success did not dishearten the Choiseuls. They sent this time to madame de Bearn, M. de Roquelaure, bishop of Senlis, and grand almoner to the king. This prelate was much liked at court, and in high favor with mesdames (the king's daughters). We were good friends together at last, but in this particular he was very near doing me great wrong. M. de Roquelaure having called on madame de Bearn, told her that he well knew the nature of her communications with me.

"Do not flatter yourself," said he, "that you will obtain thro' the influence of the comtesse du Barry, all that has been promised you. You will have opposed to you the most powerful adversaries and most august personages. It cannot be concealed from you, that mesdames contemplate the presentation of this creature with the utmost displeasure. They will not fail to obtain great influence over the future dauphin, and will do you mischief with him; so that, whether in the actual state of things, or in that which the age and health of the king must lead us to anticipate, you will be in a most unfortunate situation at court."

The old bishop, with his mischievous frankness, catechised madame de Bearn so closely, that at length she replied, that so much respect and deference did she entertain towards the princesses, that she would not present me until they should accord their permission for me to appear. M. de Roquelaure took this reply to the Choiseuls. Madame de Grammont, enchanted, thinking the point already gained, sent madame de Bearn an invitation to supper the next day, but this was not the countess's game. She was compelled to decide promptly, and she thought to preserve a strict neutrality until fresh orders should issue. What do you suppose she did? She wrote to us, madame de Grammont and myself, that she had scalded her foot, and that it was impossible for her to go from home.

On receiving her note I believed myself betrayed, forsaken. Comte Jean and I suspected that this was a feint, and went with all speed to call on the comtesse de Bearn. She received us with her usual courtesy, complained that we had arrived at the very moment of the dressing of her wound, and told us she would defer it; but I would not agree to this. My brother-in-law went into another room, and madame de Bearn began to unswathe her foot in my presence with the utmost caution and tenderness. I awaited the evidence of her falsehood, when, to my astonishment, I saw a horrible burn! I did not for a moment doubt, what was afterwards confirmed, namely, that madame de Bearn had actually perpetrated this, and maimed herself with her own free will. I mentally cursed her Roman courage, and would have sent my heroic godmother to the devil with all my heart.

Thus then was my presentation stopped by the foot of madame de Bearn. This mischance did not dampen the zeal of my friends. On the one hand, comte Jean, after having stirred heaven and earth, met with the comtesse d'Aloigny. She consented to become my godmother immediately after her own presentation, for eighty thousand livres and the expenses of the ceremony. But mesdames received her so unsatisfactorily, that my own feelings told me, I ought not to be presented at court under her auspices.

We thanked the comtesse d'Aloigny therefore, and sent her, as a remuneration, twenty thousand livres from the king.

Whilst comte Jean failed on one side, the duc d'Aiguillon succeeded on another. He was someway related to madame de Bearn. He went to visit her, and made her understand that, as the Choiseuls neither gave nor promised her anything, she would be wrong in declaring for them: that, on the other hand, if she declared for me, I could procure for her the favor of the king. Madame de Bearn yielded to his persuasions, and charged the duc d'Aiguillon to say to me, and even herself wrote, that she put herself entirely into my hands; and that, as soon as she was well, I might rely on her. What, I believe, finally decided this lady was, the fear that if she did not comply with what I required, I should content myself with the comtesse d'Aloigny.

Now assured of my introductress, I only directed my attention to the final obstacle of my presentation; I mean the displeasure of mesdames. I do not speak of madame Louise, of whom I can only write in terms of commendation; but I had opposed to me mesdames Victoire and Sophie, and especially madame Adelaide, who, as the eldest, gave them their plan of conduct. This latter, who had given too much cause to be spoken of herself to have any right to talk of others, never ceased haranguing about the scandal of my life; and I had recently, unknown to myself, fallen into complete disgrace with her. This is the case.

The apartment from which I had dislodged M. de Noailles had been requested of the king by madame

Adelaide. Ignorant of this I had installed myself there. I soon learned that I had offended the princess, and instantly hastened to offer her the apartments she wished to have. She came into them; but as it was necessary for me to be accommodated somewhere, the king gave me the former apartments of his daughter. This was what madame Adelaide called an act of tyranny; she made the château echo with her complaints: she said I had driven her out, that I wished to separate her from her sisters; that I should wean her father's affection entirely from her. Such injustice distressed me excessively. I sent to request the king to come to me; and when he entered I threw myself at his feet, entreating him to appease his daughter on any terms, and to let me go away, since I brought such trouble into his family.

The king, irritated at madame Adelaide's conduct, went to her, and told her, in a private interview, that he would make certain matters public if she did not hold her tongue; and she, alarmed, ceased her clamor, or rather, contented herself in complaining in a lower key.

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the presentation — The king and the duc de Richelieu at the comtesse du Barry's — M. de la Vauguyon — Conversation — Letter of the duke to the comtesse du Barry — Reply — The countess unites herself with the Jesuit party — Madame Louise — Madame Sophie — M. Bertin — Madame de Bercheny.

THIS fit of anger of madame Adelaide had given additional courage to the cabal. It began to exclaim and plot against me with redoubled force; hoping thus to intimidate the king, and effectually bar my presentation; but it only tended to hasten it. One evening, when the king and the maréchal de Richelieu were with me, he said to me,

« A stop must be put to these clamors. I see that until you are presented, there will be doubts perpetually arising and tormenting us on the subject; and until it takes place I shall have no ease. *Parbleu!* let us take the best means in our power of reducing these malcontents to silence.»

« Sire,» replied the maréchal, « make your will palpable, and you will see all the court submit.»

« Yes, but my daughters?»

« Mesdames know better than any persons the deference due to your orders.»

« I assure you,» replied the king, « that it will be an unpleasant quarter of an hour for me to pass.»

« Well, sire, then charge one of us with the mission: the bishop of Senlis, for instance, or M. de la Vauguyon. I feel assured that either of them will acquit himself admirably in the business, with the previous understanding that your majesty will support him with your authority.»

« I will do so most assuredly; but it will be best not to use it but at the last extremity. I have no wish to be made a bugbear to my family.»

« As to the selection of an ambassador, » I interrupted, « I beg it may not fall on M. de Roquelaure; he has been working against me for some time. »

« Why not send M. de Jarente ? » inquired the king.

« Ah, sire, » replied the duke, « because we cannot trust him; he is a gay fellow. Madame Sophie might tell him, that he only took the part of madame du Barry, because he passes his life amongst petticoats. »

« True enough, » said the king, « I prefer the duc de la Vauguyon: he has a good reputation — »

« And well deserved, » said the old maréchal, sneering. « Yes, sire, he is a pious man; at least, he plays his part well. »

« Peace, viper; you spare nobody. »

« Sire, I am only taking my revenge. »

« Why do you not like the governor of my grandsons ? »

« In truth, sire, I must confess to you, that except yourself and the ladies, I have not many likings at Versailles. »

Louis XV. smiled, and I pulled the bell; when a valet appearing, I said,

« Go and find M. de la Vauguyon for his majesty. »

When we were alone, « What, already ? » said Louis XV.

« Madame is right, » replied the duke, « we must strike while the iron is hot. »

The king began to pace up and down the room, which was his invariable custom when anything disturbed him: then suddenly stopping,

« I should not be astonished at a point blank refusal from M. de la Vauguyon. »

« Oh, sire, make yourself easy; the governor has no inclination to follow the steps of Montausier or Beauvilliers. In truth you are very candid; and I must tell you, that you have too good an opinion of us. »

At this moment M. de la Vauguyon entered. He saluted the king with humility; and asked him, in a mild tone of voice, what his pleasure was with him.

« A real mark of your zeal, » was the king's reply.

« And of your gallantry, » added the maréchal, who saw the hesitation of the king. Louis XV. was enchanted that another should speak for him. M. de Richelieu continued:

« His majesty, monsieur le duc, wishes that you should prepare mesdames to receive our dear countess here, when she shall appear before them to pay the homage of her respect and devotion.»

The king, emboldened by these words, said, « Yes, my dear duke, I can only find you in the château who have any influence over the princesses, my daughters. They have much respect, and no less friendship, for you. You will easily bring them to reason.»

As M. de la Vauguyon seemed in no hurry to undertake the charge, the maréchal added,

« Yes, sir, to manage this business properly, you and M. de Senlis are the only men in the kingdom.»

The maréchal had his reasons for saying this, for a secret jealousy existed between the governor and the grand almoner. M. de la Vauguyon made haste to say, that he could not resist his majesty's orders, and his desire to be agreeable to me.

« Ah! you will then do something for me?» I replied. « I am delighted and proud.»

« Madame,» replied the duke with much gravity, « friends are proved on occasion.»

« The present one proves your attachment to me,» said I in my turn; « and his majesty will not think it wrong of me, if, as a recompense, I embrace you in his presence»: and, on saying this, I went up to the duc de la Vauguyon, and gave him two kisses, which the poor man took as quietly as possible.

« That's well,» said the king. « You are, la Vauguyon, a man of a thousand. Listen attentively to me. I wish much that the comtesse du Barry should be presented; I wish it, and that, too, in defiance of all that can be said and done. My indignation is excited beforehand against all those who shall raise any obstacle to it. Do not fail to let my daughters know, that if they do not comply with my wishes, I will let my anger fall heavily on all persons by whose counsels they may be persuaded; for I only am master, and I will prove it to the last. These are your credentials, my dear duke, add to them what you may think fitting; I will bear you out in any thing—»

« Mercy! » said the duc de Richelieu to me in an undertone, « the king has poured forth all his energy in words; he will have none left to act upon if he meets with any resistance.» The maréchal knew the king well.

« I doubt not, sire,» replied the duc de la Vauguyon, « that the respectful duty of mesdames will be ready to comply with your desires.»

« I trust and believe it will prove so,» replied the king hastily. « I am a good father, and would not that my daughters should give me cause to be angry with them. Let madame Adelaide understand, that she has lately had a mistaken opinion of me, and that she has an opportunity of repairing her error in the present instance. The princesses are not ignorant that I have often shut my eyes upon certain affairs—. Enough; they must now testify their attachment for me. Why should they oppose the presentation of the comtesse? *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* they were not so squeamish in the days of madame de Pompadour.»

At these latter words I could not forbear laughing. La Vauguyon and de Richelieu left us and here the conversation terminated.

The next morning they brought me a note from the duc de la Vauguyon. Thus it ran:—

> MADAME,—Ready to serve you, I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you. Be persuaded that I will not tell you anything but what will be agreeable and useful to you.»

I instantly answered:—

> «You are too good a friend for me to refuse to see you willingly under any circumstances, and particularly the present. Your conduct yesterday assures you my eternal regard. Come instantly; my grateful heart expects you with impatience.»

My sister-in-law, to whom I showed this correspondence, said to me, « This gentleman does not come to see you for your bright eyes; and yet his visit is not disinterested.»

« What interest can he have to serve?»

"GET ME THE LITTLE STARS OF HEAVEN, WITH SILVER STRINGS, TO HANG THEM IN MY HAIR, YOUR MAJESTY"

By courtesy of Mr. David Belasco and Mrs. Leslie Carter. This scene is from David Belasco's play, *Du Barry*, played at Belasco's Theatre, New York, with Mrs. Leslie Carter as La Du Barry.

« None of his own, perhaps; but those villainous Jesuits.»

« Don't you like them, sister of mine?»

« I hate nobody.»

M. de la Vauguyon arrived; and as soon as we were alone, he said to me,

« Well, madame, I am now on the point of going to fight your battles. I have to deal with a redoubtable foe.»

« Do you fear?»

« Why, I am not over confident; my position is a delicate one. Mesdames will perforce obey the orders of the king, but they will not find much pleasure in seeing me the ambassador sent to them: all the Choiseul party will vociferate loudly. Nevertheless, to prove my devotion to you, I brave it all.»

« You may rely on it that I will never forget the service you are about to render me.»

« I have only one favor to ask of you. Authorize me to say to mesdames, that if the pleasures of life distract your attention from religious duties, your soul is in truth fully devoted to our holy religion; and that far from supporting the philosophers, you will aid, by your influence with the king, every measure advantageous to the society of Jesuits.»

The hypocritical tone in which this was uttered, almost compelled me to burst out into a fit of laughter; but the serious posture of my affairs induced me to preserve my gravity, and I answered in a serious tone,

« Not only, monsieur le duc, do I authorize you to say so much, but I beg you to declare to mesdames that I am already filled with love and respect for the Jesuits, and that it will not be my fault if they do not return amongst us.»

« Ah, you are a treasure of wisdom,» replied the duke, kissing my hand with fervor; « and I am disgusted at the way you are calumniated.»

« I know no reason for it, for I have never done harm to any person. Assure mesdames that I am sincerely grieved that I am not agreeable to them, and would give half my life to obtain, not their friendship, of which I do not feel myself worthy, but their indifference. Deign also to tell them, that at all times I am at their disposal, and beseech them to consider me as their humble servant.»

«It is impossible to behave more correctly than you do; and I am confident that mesdames will soon discard their unjust prejudices. Thus, it is well understood that our friends will be yours.»

«Yes, yes, provided they are really mine.»

«Certainly. I answer for them as I answer for you.»

And thus, my friend, did I find myself allied to the Jesuitical party.

The duke commenced the attack with madame Louise, the most reasonable of the king's daughters. This angelic princess, already occupied with the pious resolution which she afterwards put into execution in the following year, contented herself with saying some words on the commotion occasioned by my presence at Versailles, and then, as if her delicacy had feared to touch on such a subject, she asked the duc de la Vauguyon, if the king ordered her to receive the comtesse du Barry.

«Yes, madame,» replied the duke; «it is the express will of his majesty.»

«I submit to his wish: the lady may come when she will.»

The duke, contented with his success so far, went next to madame Sophie. This princess was not unkind, but subject to attacks of the nerves, which from time to time soured her natural disposition: she had her caprices of hatred, her fits of love. The day when the duke talked to her of my presentation she was very much provoked against me; and after the opening speech of the ambassador, flung in his teeth the report of the apartments, which I have already told you. The duke explained to her, and that too without saying anything unfavorable of madame Adelaide, and concluded by begging her to concede the favor I besought. Madame eluded this, by saying, that before she gave a definite reply she wished to confer with her sisters.

Madame Victoire was not more easily persuaded. This princess had amiable qualities, solid virtues which made her loved and respected by the whole court; but she had but little will of her own, and allowed herself to be led by the Choiseuls; who, to flatter her, told her that she alone had inherited the energy of her grandfather, Louis XIV. She was advised to display it in this instance, and, she would willingly have done so. The comtesse de Bercheny, one of her ladies in waiting, was the person who urged her on to the greatest resistance. This lady did not cease to exclaim against me, and to fan the flame of displeasure which, but for her, would never have appeared. I was informed of the mode adopted by madame de Bercheny to injure me. I sent for M. Bertin, who was devoted to my service, and begged him to go and speak to the lady; he went, and made her understand that the king, enraged against her, would expel her from Versailles, if she were not silent. The comtesse de Bercheny was alarmed; and under pretence of taking a tour, left the court for a month. You will see anon the result of all these conferences.

CHAPTER XIV.

The princesses consent to the presentation of madame du Barry — Ingenious artifice employed by the king to offer a present to the duc de la Vauguyon — Madame du Barry's letter respecting it — The duke's reply — The king's letter — The court in despair — Couplets concerning madame du Barry — Her presentation — A change in public opinion — An evening party at the house of the countess — Joy of her partizans — Conversation with the chancellor respecting the lady of the maréchal de Mirepoix.

THE departure of the comtesse de Bercheny was announced to the princesses in the manner least likely to provoke their regrets. Nevertheless, a rumor never slept at Versailles, a whisper was quickly circulated thro'-out the castle, that this sudden and unexpected journey had originated in the king's weariness of her continual philippics against me; and it was clearly comprehended by all, that a similar disgrace would be the portion of those who should offend the monarch whilst seeking to procure my humiliation. This show of firmness was sufficient to repress the daring flights of those self-constituted heroines, whose courage lasted only whilst the king was silent, and who trembled like a leaf before the slightest manifestation of his will. Still the cabal against me, tho' weakened, was not destroyed; it was too strong for the present shock to dissolve it; and altho' none was sufficiently hardy to declare open war, plots were constantly going on to ensnare me.

Meanwhile madame Victoire, left to herself, could not long support such excessive animosity; and the duc de la Vauguyon profiting by the species of lassitude into which she appeared to have fallen, led her without difficulty to act in conformity to the king's wishes.

There remained now therefore but madame Adelaide to overcome, and the task became more difficult in proportion to the elevated rank she occupied at court. By priority of birth she held the first place there; and hitherto this superiority had been ceded to her without dispute, more particularly since the hand of death had removed both the queen her mother, and the dauphiness her sister-in-law. She therefore could only view with uneasiness the prospect of another appearing on the stage whose influence would be greater than hers; and who (until the young dauphiness should attain to years of maturity) might deprive her of all honors but those due to her birth. Madame Adelaide was gifted with good sense, affability of manners, and a kind and compassionating heart towards all who needed her aid; her disposition was good, but she loved dominion, and the least show of resistance to her wishes was painful and offensive to her. She was determined to uphold the duc de Choiseul; and my decided manner towards that minister plainly evinced how little I should feel inclined to support her view of things. There were therefore several reasons for my presence at court being unpleasant to madame Adelaide.

Against her therefore did the duc de la Vauguyon direct his batteries. She received his attack with the most determined obstinacy; all was in vain, she was unconquerable, and the most skilfully devised plans were insufficient to surmount her resistance; it was therefore necessary to have recourse to the clergy, who were at that time completely led by the Jesuits; each member of the church, up to the archbishop of Paris, was called upon to interfere, or their names were employed in default of their presence. It was pointed out to madame Adelaide that I possessed good intentions with feelings of religion, which, however stifled by the freedom of the age, only required careful management to produce a rich development. The success of this last mode of attack astonished the duke himself; and madame, dazzled by the hopes of my conversion, as well as weary of hostilities, yielded her consent to my being presented. After these private negotiations the four sisters met at the house of the elder one; and there they decided that since the king had so expressly manifested his pleasure relative to my presentation, they should conform to the desire of their father, by receiving me with every possible mark of courtesy.

The duc de la Vauguyon hastened to communicate to me this happy state of things; and my joy was so great, that I embraced him with the sincerest warmth, assuring him that I should always look upon him as my best friend, and seek to testify my regard at every opportunity that fell in my way of forwarding his interests.

Some days afterwards the king brought me a splendid ring, worth thirty-six thousand livres.

« You must send this jewel to your good friend the duke,» said he.

«I dare not,» replied I. «I fear lest it should draw forth his displeasure.»

«No, no,» cried the king, «'tis not the fashion at court to construe gifts like this into insults, but I should wish this trifle to be presented in an indirect manner»; and, after having considered a moment, «I have it,» exclaimed he, «I have thought of a clever expedient; let us put this ring upon the finger of that Chinese mandarin before us, and give the figure with the ring, considering it merely an appendage to it. Assuredly the most disinterested man cannot refuse to accept a china figure.»

I extolled the king's idea as being a most happy one; and he immediately fitted the ring upon the little finger of the mandarin, which I caused to be carried to the duc de la Vauguyon with the following billet:—

«MONSIEUR LE DUC,—You have been my best friend; 'tis to your kind offices that I owe the confirmation of my happiness; but I would secure the continuance of your valuable friendship, and for that purpose I send you a little magical figure, which, placed in your cabinet, will compel your thoughts to occupy themselves with me in spite of yourself. I am superstitious enough to rely greatly upon the talismanic virtue of the charmed porcelain; and further, I must tell you, that I was not its purchaser in the first instance, neither did I adorn it for your acceptance. I should not have ventured to offer more than the assurance of my everlasting esteem and regard for your acceptance. The trifle sent comes from a higher source; and the august hand so dear to both of us, deigned to preside over the arrangement. Should there be in it anything at all repugnant to your feelings, I beseech you bear me no ill will for it; for truly, I may say, I should never have summoned courage to do that which has just been done by him whom all unite in loving and esteeming.»

The duke replied,—

«Your talisman is welcome; yet its magic power, far from augmenting the warmth of my feelings towards you, would have diminished it on account of a certain accessory with which my friendship could have well dispensed: however, what you say on the subject closes my lips. I gratefully acknowledge the daily favors bestowed upon me from the august hand of whom you speak; and I receive with the deepest respect (mingled with regret) the gracious present he deigns to convey to me by you. I own that I should have preferred, to the splendid jewel which bedecked the finger of your deity, a Chinese counterpart, which might indeed have enabled all admiring gazers to say, ‹these two are truly a pair.› As for yourself, who would fain pass for nobody in the munificent gift, I thank you at least for the flattering place you assign me in your recollection. Be assured I feel its full value, and you may confidently reckon upon the disposal of my poor credit as well as command the little influence I may be said to possess in the castle. Adieu, madame, I entreat your acceptance of the expression of my most sincere and respectful devotion.»

The king, having read M. de la Vauguyon's letter, sent immediately to the china manufactory to purchase the fellow mandarin so much coveted by the duke, and caused it to be conveyed to him with the following words:—

«My dear Governor—You are a kind-hearted creature I know, and a great promoter of domestic harmony; to fain unite the wife with the husband. Heaven grant that such a measure may indeed bring about your proposed felicity! However, by way of furthering your schemes, I send the Chinese lady, whose beauty I trust will not disturb your repose, for, spite of your sanctity, I know you can be as gallant as the rest of us, and possibly this beautiful mandarin may prove to be more lovely in your eyes, than in those of the husband for whom she is destined; but, in sober earnestness, I would wish you to be convinced that my intention is not to attempt payment for the services rendered me, but simply to evince my sense of their value. There is one beside me at this moment who has given me a kiss to transmit to you—You will easily guess who has had the audacity to enlist me into her service upon such an occasion.»

This was one of the recompenses offered to the duc de la Vauguyon, as a compensation for the public clamor and dislike which sprung up against him in consequence of his zeal for my service. At Versailles, the general ferment was at its height, when it became generally known that I had triumphed over all obstacles, and that my presentation was certainly to take place. In the midst of all this the desperate odium fell upon the duc de la Vauguyon, and a general attack was made upon him: his virtues, reputation, talents, qualities, were made the subject of blame and scandal — in a word, he was run down by public opinion. But the leaders of the cabal were not the less struck by the news of my success, which sounded in their ears like the falling of a thunder-bolt.

The silly princess de Guemêné, who, with her husband, has since become a bankrupt to so enormous and scandalous an amount, flew without delay to convey the tidings of my victory to the duchesse de Grammont, to whom it was a death-blow. All her courage forsook her; she shed bitter tears, and displayed a weakness so much the more ridiculous, as it seemed to arise from the utmost despair. She repaired to madame Adelaide, before whom she conducted herself in the most absurd and extravagant manner. The poor princess, intimidated by the weakness she herself evinced, in drawing back after she had in a manner espoused the opposite party, durst not irritate her, but, on the contrary, strove to justify her own change of conduct towards me, by urging the impossibility of refusing obedience to the express command of the king.

The other princesses did not evince greater firmness when overwhelmed by the complaints of the cabal, and in a manner bent their knee before the wives of the French nobility, asking their pardon for their father's error in selecting a mistress from any rank but theirs. About this period a song, which I admired greatly, was circulated abroad. My enemies interpreted it to my disadvantage, but I was far from being of the same opinion. It was successively attributed to the most clever men in Paris, and I have myself met with four who each asserted himself to be the author; in justice it should be ascribed to him who appeared the most calculated to have written it, and who indeed claimed it for his own — the chevalier de Boufflers. I do not know whether you recollect the lines in question. I will transcribe them from memory, adding another couplet, which was only known amongst our own particular circle, but which proves most incontestably the spirit of kindness with which the stanzas were composed.

Lise, ta beauté séduit,
   Et charme tout le monde.
En vain la duchesse en rougit,
   Et la princesse en gronde,
Chacun sait que Vénus naquit
   De l'écume de l'onde.

En rit-elle moins tous les dieux.
   Lui rendre un juste hommage!
Et Paris, le berger fameux,
   Lui donner l'avantage
Même sur la reine des cieux
   Et Minerve la sage?

Dans le sérail du grand seigneur,
   Quelle est la favorite?
C'est la plus belle au gré de cœur
   Du maître qui l'habite.
C'est le seul titre en sa faveur
   Et c'est le vrai mérite.

Que Grammont tonne contre toi,
   La chose est naturelle.
Elle voudrait donner la loi
   Et n'est qu' une mortelle;
Il faut, pour plaire au plus grand roi,
   Sans orgueil être belle.*

Thy beauty, seductress, leads mortals astray,
Over hearts, Lise, how vast and resistless thy sway.

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*From those readers who may understand this *chanson* in the original, and look somewhat contemptuously on the following version, the translator begs to shelter himself under the well-known observation of Lord Chesterfield, «that everything suffers by translation but a bishop!» Those to whom such a dilution is necessary will perhaps be contented with the skim-milk as they cannot get the cream.— Trans.

Cease, duchess, to blush! cease, princess, to rave —
Venus sprang from the foam of the ocean wave.
All the gods pay their homage at her beauteous shrine,
And adore her as potent, resistless, divine!
To her Paris, the shepherd, awarded the prize,
Sought by Juno the regal, and Pallas the wise.

Who rules o'er her lord in the Turkish *sérail*,
Reigns queen of his heart, and e'er basks in his smile?
'Tis she, who resplendent, shines loveliest of all,
And beauty holds power in her magic thrall.
Then heed not the clamors that Grammont may raise,
How natural her anger! how vain her dispraise!
'Tis not a mere mortal our monarch can charm,
Free from pride is the beauty that bears off the palm.

This song was to be found in almost every part of France. Altho the last couplet was generally suppressed, so evident was its partial tone towards me, in the midst of it all I could not help being highly amused with the simplicity evinced by the good people of France, who, in censuring the king's conduct, found nothing reprehensible but his having omitted to select his mistress from elevated rank.

The citizens resented this falling off in royalty with as much warmth and indignation as the grandees of the court; and I could enjoy a laugh on the subject of their angry displeasure as soon as my presentation was decided upon.

The intrigues carried on by those about the princesses, and the necessity of awaiting the perfect recovery of madame de Bearn, delayed this (to me) important day till the end of the month of April, 1770. On the evening of the 21st the king, according to custom, announced a presentation for the following day; but he durst not explain himself more frankly; he hesitated, appeared embarrassed, and only pronounced my name in a low and uncertain voice; it seemed as tho' he feared his own authority was insufficient to support him in such a measure. This I did not learn till some time afterwards; and when I did hear it, I took the liberty of speaking my opinion upon it freely to his majesty.

On the next day, the 22d, I was solely engrossed with my dress: it was the most important era of my life, and I would not have appeared on it to any disadvantage. A few days previously, the king had sent me, by the crown jeweller, Boemer, a set of diamonds, valued at 150,000 livres, of which he begged my acceptance. Delighted with so munificent a present I set about the duties of the toilet with a zeal and desire of pleasing which the importance of the occasion well excused. I will spare you the description of my dress; were I writing to a woman I would go into all these details; but as I know they would not be to your taste, I will pass all these uninteresting particulars over in silence, and proceed to more important matter.

Paris and Versailles were filled with various reports. Thro'out the city, within, without the castle, all manner of questions were asked, as tho' the monarchy itself was in danger. Couriers were dispatched every instant with fresh tidings of the great event which was going on. A stranger who had observed the general agitation would easily have remarked the contrast between the rage and consternation of my enemies and the joy of my partizans, who crowded in numbers to the different avenues of the palace, in order to feast their eyes upon the pageantry of my triumphal visit to court.

Nothing could surpass the impatience with which I was expected; hundreds were counting the minutes, whilst I, under the care of my hairdresser and robemaker, was insensible to the rapid flight of time, which had already carried us beyond the hour appointed for my appearance. The king himself was a prey to an unusual uneasiness; the day appeared to him interminable; and the eagerness with which he awaited me made my delay still more apparent. A thousand conjectures were afloat as to the cause of it. Some asserted that my presentation had been deferred for the present, and, in all probability, would never take place; that the princesses had opposed it in the most decided manner, and had refused upon any pretense whatever to admit me to their presence. All these suppositions charmed my enemies, and filled them with hopes which their leaders, better informed, did not partake.

Meanwhile the king's restlessness increased; he kept continually approaching the window to observe what was going on in the court-yard of the castle, and seeing there no symptoms of my equipage being in attendance, began to lose both temper and patience. It has been asserted, that he gave orders to have the presentation put off till a future period, and that the duc de Richelieu procured my *entrée* by force; this is partly true and partly false. Whilst in ignorance of the real cause of my being so late, the king said to the first gentleman of the chamber,

« You will see that this poor countess has met with some accident, or else that her joy has been too much for her, and made her too ill to attend our court to-day; if that be the case, it is my pleasure that her presentation should not be delayed beyond to-morrow. »

« Sire, » replied the duke, « your majesty's commands are absolute. »

These words, but half understood, were eagerly caught up, and interpreted their own way by those who were eager to seize anything that might tell to my prejudice.

At length I appeared; and never had I been more successful in appearance. I was conducted by my godmother, who, decked like an altar, was all joy and satisfaction to see herself a sharer in such pomp and splendor. The princesses received me most courteously; the affability, either real or feigned, which shone in their eyes as they regarded me, and the flattering words with which they welcomed my arrival, was a mortal blow to many of the spectators, especially to the ladies of honor. The princesses would not suffer me to bend my knee before them, but at the first movement I made to perform this act of homage, they hastened to raise me, speaking to me at the same time in the most gracious manner.

But my greatest triumph was with the king. I appeared before him in all my glory, and his eyes declared in a manner not to be misunderstood by all around him the impetuous love which he felt for me. He had threatened the previous evening to let me fall at his feet without the least effort on his part to prevent it. I told him that I was sure his gallantry would not allow him to act in this manner; and we had laid a bet on the matter. As soon as I approached him, and he took my hand to prevent me, as I began to stoop before him, "You have lost, sire," said I to him.

"How is it possible to preserve my dignity in the presence of so many graces?" was his reply.

These gracious words of his majesty were heard by all around him. My enemies were wofully chagrined; but what perfected their annihilation was the palpable lie which my appearance gave to their false assertions. They had blazoned forth everywhere that my manners were those of a housemaid; that I was absurd and unladylike in my conduct; and that it was only requisite to have a glimpse of me to recognize both the baseness of my extraction, and the class of society in which my life had been hitherto spent.

But I showed manners so easy and so elegant that the people soon shook off their preconceived prejudice against me. I heard my demeanor lauded as greatly as my charms and the splendor of my attire. Nothing could be more agreeable to me. In a word, I obtained complete success, and thenceforward learnt experimentally how much the exterior and a noble carriage add to the consideration in which a person is held. I have seen individuals of high rank and proud behavior who carried no influence in their looks, because their features were plain and common place; whilst persons of low station, whose face was gifted with natural dignity, had only to show themselves to attract the respect of the multitude.

Nothing about me bespoke that I was sprung from a vulgar stock, and thus scandal of that kind ceased from the day of my presentation; and public opinion having done me justice in this particular, slander was compelled to seek for food elsewhere.

That evening I had a large circle at my house. The chancellor, the bishop of Orleans, M. de Saint-Florentin, M. Bertin, the prince de Soubise, the ducs de Richelieu, de la Trimouille, de Duras, d'Aiguillon, and d'Ayen. This last did not hesitate to come to spy out all that passed in my apartments, that he might go and spread it abroad, augmented by a thousand malicious commentaries. I had also M. de Sartines, my brother-in-law, etc. The duc de la Vauguyon alone was absent. I knew beforehand that he would not come, and that it was a sacrifice which he thought himself compelled to make to the cabal. The ladies were mesdames de Bearn and d'Aloigny, with my sisters-in-law. Amongst the ladies presented they were the only ones with whom I had formed any intimacy; as for the rest I was always the « horrible creature, » of whom they would not hear on any account.

The king, on entering, embraced me before the whole party. « You are a charming creature, » said he to me, « and the brilliancy of your beauty has to-day reminded me of the device of my glorious ancestor. »

This was a flattering commencement; the rest of the company chimed in with their master, and each tried to take the first part in the chorus. The duc d'Ayen even talked of my grace of manner. « Ah, sir, » said I to him, « I have had time to learn it from Pharamond to the reigning king. »

This allusion was bitter, and did not escape the duke, who turned pale in spite of his presence of mind, on finding that I was aware of the malicious repartee which he had made to the king when talking of me, and which I have already mentioned to you. The chancellor said to me,

« You have produced a great effect, but especially have you triumphed over the cabal by the nobility of your manners and the dignity of your mien; and thus you have deprived it of one of its greatest engines of mischief, that of calumniating your person. »

« They imagined then, » said I to him, « that I could neither speak nor be silent, neither walk nor sit still. »

« As they wished to find you ignorant and awkward they have set you down as such. This is human nature: when we hate any one, we say they are capable of any thing; then, that they have become guilty of every thing; and, to wind up all, they adopt for truth to-day what they invented last night. »

"Were you not fearful?" inquired the king.

"Forgive me, sire," I answered, "when I say that I feared lest I should not please your majesty; and I was excessively desirous of convincing mesdames of my respectful attachment."

This reply was pronounced to be fitting and elegant, altho' I had not in any way prepared it. The fact is, that I was in great apprehension lest I should displease the king's daughters; and I dreaded lest they should manifest too openly the little friendship which they had towards me. Fortunately all passed off to a miracle, and my good star did not burn dimly in this decisive circumstance.

Amongst those who rejoiced at my triumph I cannot forget the duc d'Aiguillon. During the whole of the day he was in the greatest agitation. His future destiny was, in a measure, attached to my fortune; he knew that his whole existence depended on mine; and he expected from me powerful support to defend him against the pack of his enemies, who were yelping open-mouthed against him. He stood in need of all his strength of mind and equanimity to conceal the disquietude and perplexity by which he was internally agitated.

The comte Jean also participated in this great joy. His situation at court was not less doubtful; he had no longer reason to blush for his alliance with me, and could now form, without excess of presumption, the most brilliant hopes of the splendor of his house. His son, the vicomte Adolphe, was destined to high fortune; and I assure you that I deeply regretted when a violent and premature death took him away from his family. My presentation permitted his father to realize the chimera which he had pursued with so much perseverance. He flattered himself in taking part with me. I did not forget him in the distribution of my rewards; and the king's purse was to him a source into which he frequently dipped with both hands.

The next day I had a visit from the chancellor.

"Now," said he, "you are at the height of your wishes, and we must arrange matters, that the king shall find perpetual and varied amusements with you. He does not like large parties; a small circle is enough for him; then he is at his ease, and likes to see the same faces about him. If you follow my advice you will have but few females about you, and select that few with discernment."

"How can I choose them at all when I see so very few?" was my reply. "I have no positive intimacy with any court lady; and amongst the number I should be at a loss to select any one whom I would wish to associate with in preference to another."

"Oh, do not let that disturb you," he replied: "they leave you alone now, because each is intent on observing what others may do; but as soon as any one shall pay you a visit, the others will run as fast after you as did the sheep of Panurge. I am greatly deceived if they are not very desirous that one of them shall devote herself, and make the first dash, that they may profit by her pretended fault. I know who will not be the last to come and station herself amongst the furniture of your apartment. The maréchale de Mirepoix was too long the complaisant friend of madame de Pompadour not to become, and that very soon, the friend of the comtesse du Barry."

"Good heaven," I exclaimed, "how delighted I should be to have the friendship of this lady, whose wit and amiable manners are so greatly talked of."

"Yes," said de Maupeou, laughing, "she is a type of court ladies, a mixture of dignity and suppleness, majesty and condescension, which is worth its weight in gold. She was destined from all eternity to be the companion of the king's female friends."

We both laughed; and the chancellor went on to say: "There are others whom I will point out to you by and by; as for this one, I undertake to find out whether she will come first of the party. She has sent to ask an audience of me concerning a suit she has in hand. I will profit by the circumstances to come to an explanation with her about you. She is not over fond of the Choiseul party; and I augur this, because I see that she puts on a more agreeable air towards them."

CHAPTER XV.

The comte de la Marche, a prince of the blood — Madame de Beauvoir, his mistress — Madame du Barry complains to the prince de Soubise of the princess de Gueménée — The king consoles the countess for this — The duc de Choiseul — The king speaks to him of madame du Barry — Voltaire writes to her — The opinions of Richelieu and the king concerning Voltaire.

AMONGST those personages who came to compliment me on the evening of my presentation was M. the comte de la Marche, son of the prince du Conti, and consequently prince of the blood. He had long been devoted to the will of Louis XV. As soon as his most serene highness had wind of my favor he hastened to add to the number of my court; and I leave you to imagine how greatly I was flattered at seeing it augmented by so august a personage.

This conquest was most valuable in my eyes, for I thus proved to the world, that by attracting the king to me I did not isolate him from the whole of his family. It is very true that for some time the comte de la Marche had been out of favor with the public, by reason of his over complaisance towards the ministers of the king's pleasure; but he was not the less a prince of the blood, and at Versailles this rank compensated for almost every fault. He was a lively man, moreover, his society was agreeable, and the title he bore reflected his distinction amongst a crowd of courtiers. I felt, therefore, that I ought to consider myself as very fortunate that he deigned to visit me, and accordingly received him with all the civility I could display; and the welcome reception which he always experienced drew him frequently to my abode.

The friendship with which he honored me was not agreeable to my enemies; and they tried by every possible means to seduce him from me. They got his near relations to talk to him about it; his intimate friends to reason with him; the females whom he most admired to dissuade him from it. There was not one of these latter who did not essay to injure me in his estimation, by saying that he dishonored himself by an acquaintance with me. There was amongst others a marquise de Beauvoir, the issue of a petty nobility, whom he paid with sums of gold, altho' she was not his mistress by title. Gained over by the Choiseuls, she made proposals concerning me to the prince of so ridiculous a nature, that he said to her impatiently: « I' faith, my dear, as in the eyes of the world every woman who lives with a man who is not her husband is a ———, so I think a man is wise to choose the loveliest he can find; and in this way the king is at this moment much better off than any of his subjects.»

Only imagine what a rage this put the marquise de Beauvoir in: she stormed, wept, had a nervous attack. The comte de la Marche contemplated her with a desperate tranquillity; but this scene continuing beyond the limits of tolerable patience, he was so tired of it that he left her. This was not what the marquise wished; and she hastened to write a submissive letter to him, in which, to justify herself, she confessed to the prince, that in acting against me she had only yielded to the instigations of the cabal, and particularly alluded to mesdames de Grammont and de Gueménée.

The comte de la Marche showed me this letter, which I retained in spite of his resistance and all the efforts he made to obtain possession of it again. My intention was to show it to the king; and I did not fail to give it to him at the next visit he paid me: he read it, and shrugging up his shoulders, as was his usual custom, he said to me,

« They are devils incarnate, and the worst of the kind. They try to injure you in every way, but they shall not succeed. I receive also anonymous letters against you, they are tossed into the post-box in large packets with feigned names, in the hope that they will reach me.

Such slanders ought not to annoy you: in the days of madame de Pompadour, the same thing was done. The same schemes were tried to ruin madame de Chateauroux. Whenever I have been suspected of any tenderness towards a particular female, every species of intrigue has been instantly put in requisition. Moreover," he continued, "madame de Grammont attacks you with too much obstinacy not to make me believe but that she would employ all possible means to attain her end."

"Ah," I exclaimed, "because she has participated in your friendship you are ready to support her."

"Do not say so in a loud tone," he replied laughingly; "her joy would know no bounds if she could believe it was in her power to inspire you with jealousy."

"But," I said, "that insolent Guemenée; has she also to plume herself on your favors as an excuse for overpowering me with her hatred, and for tearing me to pieces in the way she does?"

"No," was the king's answer; "she is wrong, and I will desire her father-in-law to say so."

"And I will come to an explanation with the prince de Soubise on this point; and we will see whether or not I will allow myself to have my throat cut like an unresisting sheep."

I did not fail to keep my word. The prince de Soubise came the next morning; chance on that day induced him to be extraordinarily gallant towards me; never had he praised me so openly, or with so much exaggeration. I allowed him to go on; but when at length he had finished his panegyric, "Monsieur le maréchal," said I to him, "you are overflowing with kindness towards me, and I wish that all the members of your family would treat me with the same indulgence."

Like a real courtier he pretended not to understand me, and made no reply, hoping, no doubt, that the warmth of conversation would lead me to some other subject; but this one occupied me too fully to allow me to divert my attention from it; and, seeing that he continued silent, I continued : "Far from treating me as well as you do, madame your daughter-in-law behaves towards me like a declared enemy; she assails me by all sorts of provocation, and at last will so act, that I shall find myself compelled to struggle against her with open force."

You must be a courtier, you must have been in the presence of a king who is flattered from morning to night in all his caprices, to appreciate the frightful state in which my direct attack placed the prince de Soubise. Neither his political instinct, nor the tone of pleasantry which he essayed to assume, nor the more dangerous resource of offended dignity, could extricate him from the embarrassment in which he was thrown by my words. He could do nothing but stammer out a few unintelligible phrases; and his confusion was so great and so visible, that the marquis de Chauvelin, his not over sincere friend, came to his assistance. The king, equally surprised at what I had just said, hastily turned and spoke to Chon, who told me afterwards, that the astonishment of Louis XV. had been equal to that of the prince de Soubise, and that he had evinced it by the absence of mind which he had manifested in his discourse and manners.

M. de Chauvelin then turning towards me, said, "Well, madame, on what evil herb have you walked to-day? Can it be possible that you would make the prince, who is your friend, responsible for the hatred which ought to be flattering rather than painful to you, since it is a homage exacted towards your brilliant loveliness?"

"In the first place," I replied, "I have no intention to cast on monsieur le maréchal, whom I love with all my heart, the least responsibility relative to the object of which I complain. I only wished to evince to him the regret I experienced at not seeing all the members of his family like him: this is all. I should be in despair if I thought I had said anything that would wound him; and if I have done so, I most sincerely ask his pardon."

On saying these words I presented my hand to the prince, who instantly kissed it.

"You are," said he, "at the same time cruel and yet most amiable: but if you have the painful advantage of growing old at court, you will learn that my children have not all the deference and respect towards me which they owe to their father; and I often am pained to see them act in a manner entirely opposite to my desires, however openly manifested. If my daughter does not love you, it is to me, most probably, that you must look for the *why* and *wherefore:* it is because I love you so much that she is against you. I have committed an error in praising you before her, and her jealousy was not proof against it."

"That is very amiable in you," said I; "and now whatever may be my feelings against the princesse de Geuménée, I will endeavor to dissemble it out of regard for you; and, I assure you, that however little consideration your daughter-in-law may testify towards me, I will show her a fair side: endeavor to make peace between us. I only ask to be let alone, for I do not seek to become the enemy of any person."

Altho' M. de Soubise said that he had no influence over the princesse de Gueménée, I learned, subsequently, that the day after this scene he testified to the Gueménée some fears as to his future destiny at court. He begged her not to oppose herself to me; to be silent with respect to me, and to keep herself somewhat in the shade if she would not make some advances towards me. His daughter-in-law, whose arrogance equalled her dissipation and dissolute manners, replied, that she was too much above a woman of my sort to fear or care for me; that my reign at the château would be but brief, whilst hers would only terminate with her life: that she would never consent to an act of weakness that would be derogatory to her character and rank. In vain did the prince try to soften her, and make her consider that my influence over the king was immense: he preached to the desert, and was compelled to abandon his purpose without getting any thing by his endeavors.

I now return to my conversation with him. During the time it lasted the king did not cease talking to Chon, all the time listening with attention to what the prince and I were saying; and he did not approach us until the intervention of M. de Chauvelin had terminated this kind of a quarrel. He returned to his seat in front of the fire; and when we were alone, said to me,

"You have been very spiteful to the poor maréchal, and I suffered for him."

"You are an excellent friend; and, no doubt, it is the affection you bear to M. de Soubise which makes you behave so harshly to me. Can I not, without displeasing you, defend myself when I am attacked?"

"I did not say so; but is it necessary that he must be responsible for the follies of his relations?"

"In truth, sire, so much the worse for the father who cannot make his children respect him. If the maréchal was respected by the public, believe me he would be so by his family."

This retort was perhaps too severe. I found this by the silence of the king; but as, in fact, it imported little, and, by God's help, I was never under much constraint with him, I saw him blush, and then he said to me,

"Now, I undertake to bring madame de Guemenée into proper order. The favor I ask is, that you would not meddle. I have power enough to satisfy you, but, for heaven's sake, do not enter into more quarrels than you have already. It seems to me that you ought to avoid them instead of creating such disturbances."

He had assumed a grave tone in reading me this lecture: but as we were in a place in which majesty could not be committed, I began to laugh heartily, and to startle him, I said that henceforward I would pilot my bark myself, and defend myself by openly assailing all persons who testified an aversion to me. How laughable it was to see the comic despair in which this determination threw the king. It seemed to him that the whole court would be at loggerheads; and he could not restrain himself from exclaiming, that he would a hundred times rather struggle against the king of Prussia and the emperor of Germany united, than against three or four females of the château. In a word, I frightened him so completely, that he decided on the greatest act of courage he had ever essayed in my favor: it was, to desire the intervention of the duc de Choiseul in all these quarrels.

The credit of this minister was immense, and this credit was based on four powerful auxiliaries; namely, the parliament, the philosophers, the *literati*, and the women. The high magistracy found in him a public and private protector. The parliaments had themselves a great many clients, and their voices, given to the duc de Choiseul, gave him great power in the different provinces. The philosophers, ranged under the banner of Voltaire, who was their god, and of d'Alembert, their patriarch, knew all his inclinations for them, and knew how far they might rely on his support in all attempts which they made to weaken the power of the clergy, and to diminish the gigantic riches which had been amassed by prelates and monasteries. The writers were equally devoted to him: they progressed with the age, and as on all sides they essayed to effect important reforms, it was natural that they should rally about him in whose hands was the power of their operations.

The ladies admired his gallantry: in fact, the duc de Choiseul was a man who understood marvellously well how to combine serious labors with pleasure. I was, perhaps, the only woman of the court whom he would not love, and yet I was not the least agreeable nor the most ugly. It was very natural for them to exalt his merit and take him under their especial protection. Thus was he supported in every quarter by them; they boasted of his measures, and by dint of repeating in the ears of every body that M. de Choiseul was a minister *par excellence*, and the support of monarchy, they had contrived to persuade themselves of the truth of their assertion. In fact, if France found herself freed from the Jesuits, it was to the duc de Choiseul that this was owing, and this paramount benefit assured to him universal gratitude.

The king was fully aware of this unanimity of public opinion in favor of his minister. He was, besides, persuaded, that in arranging the *pacte de famille*, and concluding the alliance with the imperial house, the duc de Choiseul had evinced admirable diplomatic talents, and rendered France real and important service. His attachment to him was incumbent, and rested on solid foundations. If, at a subsequent period, he dismissed him, it was because he was deceived by a shameful intrigue which it will cost me pain to develop to you, because I took by far too much a leading part in it, which now causes me the deepest regret.

Now, by the act of my presentation, the duc de Choiseul would be compelled to meet me often, which would render our mutual situation very disagreeable. On this account the king sought to reconcile us, and would have had no difficulty in effecting his wishes had he only had the resistance of the minister and his wife to encounter. The lady had not much influence over her husband, and besides she had too much good sense to struggle against the wishes of the king: but the duchesse de Grammont was there, and this haughty and imperious dame had so great an ascendancy with her brother, and behaved with so little caution, that the most odious reports were in circulation about their intimacy.

It could scarcely be hoped that we could tame this towering spirit, which saw in me an odious rival. Louis XV. did not flatter himself that he could effect this prodigy, but he hoped to have a greater ascendancy over his minister. It was to the duc de Choiseul, therefore, that he first addressed himself, desirous of securing the husband and wife before he attacked the redoubtable sister. The next morning, after my warm assault on the prince de Soubise, he profited by an audience which the duke requested at an unusual hour to introduce this negotiation of a new kind, and the details I give you of this scene are the more faithful, as the king gave them to me still warm immediately after the conversation had terminated.

The state affairs having been concluded, the king, seeking to disguise his voluntary embarrassment, said to the duke, smiling,

"Duc de Choiseul, I have formed for my private hours a most delightful society: the most attached of my subjects consider themselves highly favored when I invite them to these evening parties so necessary for my amusement. I see with pain that you have never yet asked me to admit you there."

"Sire," replied the duke, "the multiplicity of the labors with which your majesty has charged me, scarcely allows me time for my pleasures."

"Oh, you are not so fully occupied but that you have still some time to spend with the ladies, and I think that I used to meet you frequently at the marquise de Pompadour's."

"Sire, she was my friend."

"Well, and why, is not the comtesse du Barry? Who has put it into your head that she was opposed to you? You do not know her: she is an excellent woman: not only has she no dislike to you, but even desires nothing more than to be on good terms with you."

"I must believe so since your majesty assures me of it; but, sire, the vast business with which I am overwhelmed — "

"Is not a sufficing plea; I do not allow that without a special motive, you should declare yourself against a person whom I honor with my protection. As you do not know her, and cannot have any thing to urge against her but prejudices founded on false rumors and scandalous fabrications, I engage you to sup with me at her apartments this evening, and I flatter myself that when I wish it you will not coin a parcel of reasons in opposition to my desire."

"I know the obedience that is due to your majesty," said de Choiseul, bowing low.

"Well, then, do first from duty what I flatter myself you will afterwards do from inclination. Duc de Choiseul, do not allow yourself to be influenced by advice that will prove injurious to you. What I ask cannot compromise you; but I should wish that with you all should be quiet, that no one should struggle against me, and that too with the air of contending against a person's station. Do not reply, you know perfectly what I would say, and I know what belongs to myself."

Here the conversation terminated. The duc de Choiseul did not become my friend any the more, but behaved towards me with all due consideration. He used grace and *finesse* in his proceedings, without mingling with it anything approaching to nonsense. He never allowed himself, whatever has been said, to dart out in my face any of those epigrams which public malignity has attributed to him. Perhaps like many other persons in the world, he has said many pleasantries of me which have been reported as said in my presence, but I repeat that he never uttered in my society a single word with which I had cause to be offended.

At this juncture I received a letter of which I had the folly to be proud, altho' a little reflection should have made me think that my situation alone inspired it: it was from M. de Voltaire. This great genius was born a courtier. Whether he loved the protection of the great, or whether he thought it necessary to him, he was constantly aiming, from his youth upwards, at obtaining the countenance of persons belonging to a high rank, which made him servile and adulatory whilst they were in power, and full of grimace towards them when the wind favor ceased to swell their sails. It was in this way that mesdames de Châteauroux and de Pompadour had had his homage. He had sung their praises, and, of course, he could not forget me. You will recall to mind the letter which he wrote to the duc d'Aiguillon, on occasion of the piece of poetry entitled "*La Cour du Roi Petaud.*" He had denied having composed it, but this denial had not been addressed directly to me. Having learnt, no doubt, that my credit was increasing, he thought himself obliged to write to me, that he might rank me with his party. He might have availed himself of the intermediation of the duc d'Aiguillon, but preferred putting the duc de Richelieu into his confidence, and begged him to fulfil the delicate function of literary Mercury. I was alone when the maréchal came to me with an assumed air of mystery. His first care was to look around him without saying a word; and it was not until after he had shaken the curtains, and peeped into every corner of the apartment, that he approached me, who was somewhat surprised at his monkey tricks.

« I am the bearer, » he said, in a low voice, « of a secret and important communication, which I have been entreated to deliver after five or six hundred cautions at least: it is a defection from the enemy's camp, and not the least in value. »

Fully occupied by my quarrel with the ladies of the court, I imagined that he had brought me a message of peace from some great lady; and, full of this idea, I asked him in haste the name of her whose friendship I had acquired.

« Good, » said he, « it is about a lady, is it? It is from a personage fully as important, a giant in power, whose words resound from one extremity of Europe to another, and whom the Choiseuls believe their own entirely. »

« It is M. de Voltaire, » I said.

« Exactly so: your perspicacity has made you guess it. »

« But what does he want with me? »

« To be at peace with you; to range himself under your banner, secretly at first, but afterwards openly. »

« Is he then afraid openly to evince himself my friend? » I replied, in a tone of some pique.

« Rather so, and yet you must not feel offended at that. The situation of this sarcastic and talented old man is very peculiar; his unquiet petulance incessantly gives birth to fresh perils. He, of necessity, must make friends in every quarter, left and right, in France and foreign countries. The necessary consequence is, that he cannot follow a straight path. The Choiseuls have served him with perfect zeal: do not be astonished if he abandon them when they can no longer serve him. If they fall, he will bid them good evening, and will sport your cockade openly. »

« But, » I replied, « this is a villainous character. »

« Ah, I do not pretend to introduce to you an Aristides or an Epaminondas, or any other soul of similar stamp. He is a man of letters, full of wit, a deep thinker, a superior genius, and our reputations are in his hands. If he flatters us, posterity will know it; if he laughs at us, it will know it also. I counsel you therefore to use him well, if you would have him behave so towards you. »

« I will act conformably to your advice,» said I to the maréchal; « at the same time I own to you that I fear him like a firebrand.»

« I, like you, think that there is in him something of the infernal stone: he burns you on the slightest touch. But now, to this letter; you will see what he says to you. He begs me most particularly to conceal from every body the step he has taken with you. What he most dreads is, lest you should proclaim from the housetops that he is in correspondence with you. I conjure you, on his behalf, to exercise the greatest discretion, and I think that you are interested in doing so; for, if what he has done should be made public, he will not fail to exercise upon you the virulence of his biting wit.»

Our conversation was interrupted by a stir which we heard in the château, and which announced to us the king. The maréchal hastily desired me not to show Voltaire's letter to the king until I had read it previously to myself. « He does not like this extraordinary man,» he added, « and accuses him of having failed in respect, and perhaps you will find in this paper some expression which may displease him.»

Scarcely had I put the epistle in my pocket, when the king entered.

« What are you talking about,» said he, « you seem agitated ? »

« Of M. de Voltaire, sire,» I replied, with so much presence of mind as to please the duc de Richelieu.»

« What, is he at his tricks again ? Have you any cause of complaint against him ? »

« Quite the reverse; he has charged M. d'Argental to say to M. de Richelieu, that he was sorry that he could not come and prostrate himself at my feet.»

« Ah,» said the king, remembering the letter to the duc d'Aiguillon, « he persists in his coquetries towards you: that is better than being lampooned by him. But do not place too much confidence in this gentleman of the chamber: he weighs every thing in two scales; and I doubt much whether he will spare you when he evinces but little consideration for me.»

Certainly Richelieu had a good opportunity of undertaking the defence of his illustrious friend. He did no such thing; and I have always thought that Voltaire was the person whom the duke detested more heartily than any other person in the world. He did, in fact, dread him too much to esteem him as a real friend.

"M. d'Argental," said the king, "unites then at my court the double function of minister of Parma and steward of Ferney.* Are these two offices compatible?"

"Yes, sire," replied the duke, laughing, "since he has not presented officially to your majesty the letters of his creation as comte de Tournay."

The king began to laugh. This was the name of an estate which Voltaire had, and which he sometimes assumed.

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*The name of Voltaire's residence.—TRANS.

CHAPTER XVI.

Unpublished letter of Voltaire to madame du Barry — Reply of the countess — The maréchale de Mirepoix — Her first interview with madame du Barry — Anecdote of the diamonds of madame de Mirepoix — The king pays for them — Singular gratitude of the maréchale — The portfolio, and an unpublished letter of the marquise de Pompadour.

BY THE way in which the king continued to speak to me of M. de Voltaire, I clearly saw how right the duke was in advising me to read the letter myself before I showed it to my august protector. I could not read it until the next day, and found it conceived in the following terms: —

"MADAME LA COMTESSE:— I feel myself urged by an extreme desire to have an explanation with you, after the receipt of a letter which M. the duc d'Aiguillon wrote to me last year. This nobleman, nephew of a gentleman, as celebrated for the name he bears as by his own reputation, and who has been my friend for more than sixty years, has communicated to me the pain which had been caused you by a certain piece of poetry, of my writing as was stated, and in which my style was recognised. Alas! madame, ever since the most foolish desire in the world has excited me to commit a great deal of idle trash to paper, not a month, a week, nay, even a day passes in which I am not accused and convicted of some great enormity; that is to say, the malicious author of all sorts of turpitudes and extravagancies. Eh! *mon Dieu*, the entire life-time of ten men would not be sufficient to write all with which I am charged, to my unutterable despair in this world, and to my eternal damnation in that which is to come.

"It is no doubt, much to die in final impenitence; altho' hell may contain all the honest men of antiquity and a great portion of those of our times; and paradise would not be much to hope for if we must find ourselves face to face with messieurs Fréron, Nonatte, Patouillet, Abraham Chauneix, and other saints cut out of the same cloth. But how much more severe would it be to sustain your anger! The hatred of the Graces brings down misfortune on men of letters; and when he embroils himself with Venus and the Muses he is a lost being; as, for instance, M. Dorat, who incessantly slanders his mistresses, and writes nothing but puerilities.

« I have been very cautious, in my long career, how I committed such a fault. If perchance I have lightly assailed the common cry of scribblers or pendants who were worthless, I have never ceased to burn incense on the altars of the ladies; them I have always sung when I — could not do otherwise. Independently, madame, of the profound respect I bear all your sex. I profess a particular regard towards all those who approach our sovereign, and whom he invests with his confidence: in this I prove myself no less a faithful subject than a gallant Frenchman; and I venerate the God I serve in his constant friendships as I would do in his caprices. Thus I was far from outraging and insulting you still more grieviously by composing a hateful work which I detest with my whole heart, and which makes me shed tears of blood when I think that people did not blush to attribute it to me.

« Believe in my respectful attachment, madame, no less than in my cruel destiny, which renders me odious to those by whom I would be loved. My enemies, a portion of whom are amongst yours, certainly succeed each other with frightful eagerness to try my wind. Now they have just published under my name some attacks on the poor president Hénault, whom I love with sincere affection. What have they not attributed to me to inculpate me with my friends, with my illustrious protectors, M. le maréchal duc de Richelieu, and their majesties the king of Prussia and the czarina of Russia!

« I could excuse them for making war upon strangers in my name, altho' that would be a pirate's method; but to attack, under my banner, my master, my sovereign lord, this I can never pardon, and I will raise against them even a dying voice; particularly when they strike you with the same blows; you, who love literature; you, who do me the honor to charge your memory with my feeble productions. It is an infamy to pretend that I fire on my own troops.

« Under any circumstances, madame, I am before you in a very delicate situation. There is in Versailles a family which overwhelms me with marks of their friendship. Mine ought to appertain to it to perpetuity; yet I learn that it is so unfortunate as to have no conception of your merit, and that envious talebearers place themselves between you and it. I am told there is a kind of declared war; it is added, that I have furnished supplies to this camp, the chiefs of which I love and esteem. More wise, more submissive, I keep myself out of the way of blows; and my reverence for the supreme master is such, that I turn away my very eyes that they may not be spectators of the fight.

« Do not then, madame, think that any sentiment of affection has compelled, or can compel me to take arms against you. I would refuse any proposition which should rank me as hostile to you, if the natural generosity of your enemies could so far forget itself. In reality they are as incapable of ordering a bad action as I am of listening to those who should show themselves so devoid of sense as to propose such a thing to me.

«I am persuaded that you have understood me, and I am fully cleared in your eyes. It would be delightful to me to ascertain this with certainty. I charge M. le maréchal duc de Richelieu to explain to you my disquietude on this head, and the favor I seek at your hands, from you who command France, whilst I, I ought to die in peace, not to displease any person, and live wisely with all. I conclude, madame la comtesse, this long and stupid epistle, which is, in fact, less a letter than a real case for consideration, by begging you to believe me, etc., VOLTAIRE,

«*Ferney*, April 28, 1769. Gentleman in ordinary to the king.

«P. S. My enemies say everywhere that I am not a Christian. I have just given them the lie direct, by performing my Easter devotions (*mes pâques*) publicly; thus proving to all my lively desire to terminate my long career in the religion in which I was born; and I have fulfilled this important act after a dozen consecutive attacks of fever, which made me fear I should die before I could assure you of my respect and my devotion.»

This apology gave me real pleasure. I pretended to believe the sincerity of him who addressed me, altho' he had not convinced me of his innocence; and I wrote the following reply to M. de Voltaire, which a silly pride dictates to me to communicate to you, in conjunction with the letter of the philosopher:

«MONSIEUR: — Even were you culpable from too much friendship towards those you cherish, I would pardon you as a recompense for the letter you address to me. This ought the more to charm me, as it gives me the certainty that you had been unworthily calumniated. Could you have said, under the veil of secrecy, things disagreeable to a great king, for whom, in common with all France, you profess sincere love? It is impossible. Could you, with gaiety of heart, wound a female who never did you harm, and who admires your splendid genius? In fact, could those you call your friends have stooped so low as not to have feared to compromise you, by making you play a part unworthy of your elevated reputation? All these suppositions were unreasonable: I could not for a moment admit them, and your two letters have entirely justified you. I can now give myself up without regret to my enthusiasm for you and your works. It would have been too cruel for me to have learnt with certainty that he whom I regarded as the first writer of the age had become my detractor without motive, without provocation. That it is not so I give thanks to Providence.

«M. the duc d'Aiguillon did not deceive you when he told you that I fed on your sublime poetry. I am in literature a perfect novice, and yet am sensible of the true beauties which abound in your works. I am to be included amongst the stones which were animated by Amphion: this is one of your triumphs; but to this you must be accustomed.

«Believe also that all your friends are not in the enemy's camp. There are those about me who love you sincerely, M. de Chauvelin, for instance, MM. de Richelieu and d'Aiguillon: this latter eulogizes you incessantly; and if all the world thought as he does, you would be here in your place. But there are terrible prejudices which my candor will not allow me to dissemble, which you have to overcome. There is *one* who complains of you, and this *one* must be won over to your interests. He wishes you to testify more veneration for what he venerates himself; that your attacks should not be so vehement nor so constant. Is it then impossible for you to comply with his wishes in this particular? Be sure that you only, in setting no bounds in your attacks on religion, do yourself a vast mischief with the person in question.

«It will appear strange that I should hold such language to you; I only do it to serve you: do not take my statements unkindly. I have now a favor to ask of you; which is, to include me in the list of those to whom you send the first fruits of the brilliant productions of your pen. There is none who is more devoted to you, and who has a more ardent desire to convince you of this.

«I am, *monsieur le gentilhomme ordinaire*, with real attachment, etc.»

I showed this letter to M. de Richelieu.

«Why,» he inquired, «have you not assured him as to your indiscretion, which he fears?»

«Because his fear seemed to me unjust, and I leave you to represent me to him as I am; and now,» I added, «it does not appear to me necessary for the king to know anything of this.»

«You think wisely, madame; what most displeased him was to see madame de Pompadour in regular correspondence with M. de Voltaire.»

I have related to you this episode of my history, that it may recompense you for the tiresome details of my presentation. I resume my recital. I told you that M. de Maupeou had told me that he would endeavor to bring madame la maréchale de Mirepoix, and introduce her to me, trusting to the friendship she had evinced for madame de Pompadour during the whole time of the favor and life of her who preceded me in the affections of Louis XV. I found, to my surprise, that he said nothing to me concerning it for several days, when suddenly madame la maréchale de Mirepoix was announced.

At this name and this title I rose quite in a fluster, without clearly knowing what could be the object of this visit, for which I was unprepared. The maréchale, who followed closely on the valet's heels, did not give me time for much reflection. She took me really *à l'improviste*, and I had not time to go and meet her.

«Madame la maréchale,» said I, accosting her, «what lucky chance brings you to a place where the desire to have your society is so great?»

«It is the feeling of real sympathy,» she replied, with a gracious smile; «for I also have longed for a considerable time to visit you, and have yielded to my wishes as soon as I was certain that my advances would not be repulsed.»

«Ah, madame,» said I, «had you seriously any such fear? That tells me much less of the mistrust you had of yourself than of the bad opinion you had conceived of me. The honor of your visits—»

«The honor of my visits! That's admirable! I wish to obtain a portion of your friendship, and to testify to the king that I am sincerely attached to him.»

«You overwhelm me, madame,» cried I, much delighted, «and I beg you to give me your confidence.»

«Well, now, all is arranged between us: I suit you and you please me. It is long since I was desirous of coming to you, but we are all under the yoke of the must absurd tyranny: soon we shall have no permission to go, to come, to speak, to hold our tongues, without first obtaining the consent of a certain family. This yoke has wearied me; and on the first word of the chancellor of France I hastened to you.»

«I had begged him, madame, to express to you how much I should be charmed to have you when the king graced me with his presence. He likes you, he is accustomed to the delights of your society; and I should have been deeply chagrined had I come here only to deprive him of that pleasure."

"He is a good master," said the maréchale, "he is worthy of all our love. I have had opportunities of knowing him thoroughly, for I was most intimate with madame de Pompadour; and I believe that my advice will not be useless to you."

"I ask it of you, madame la maréchale, for it will be precious to me."

"Since we are friends, madame," said she, seating herself in a chair, "do not think ill of me if I establish myself at my ease, and take my station as in the days of yore. The king loves you: so much the better, you will have a double empire over him. He did not love the marquise, and allowed himself to be governed by her; for with him — I ask pardon of your excessive beauty — custom does all. It is necessary, my dear countess, to use the double lever you have, of your own charms and his constant custom to do to-morrow what he does to-day because he did it yesterday, and for this you lack neither grace nor wit."

I had heard a great deal concerning madame de Mirepoix; but I own to you, that before I heard her speak I had no idea what sort of a person she would prove. She had an air of so much frankness and truth, that it was impossible not to be charmed by it. The greater part of the time I did not know how to defend myself from her — at once so natural and so perfidious; and occasionally I allowed myself to love her with all my heart, so much did she seem to cherish me with all enthusiasm. She had depth of wit, a piquancy of expression, and knew how to disguise those interested adulations with turns so noble and beautiful that I have never met, neither before nor since, any woman worthy of being compared with her. She was, in her single self, a whole society; and certainly there was no possibility of being wearied when she was there. Her temper was most equable, a qualification rarely obtained without a loss of warmth of feeling. She always pleased because her business was to please and not to love; and it always sufficed her to render others enthusiastic and ardent. Except this tendency to egotism, she was the charm of society, the life of the party whom she enlivened by her presence. She knew precisely when to mourn with the afflicted, and joke with the merry-hearted. The king had much pleasure in her company: he knew that she only thought how to amuse him; and, moreover, as he had seen her from morning till evening with the marquise de Pompadour, her absence from my parties was insupportable to him, and almost contrary to the rules of etiquette at the château.

I cannot tell you how great was his satisfaction, when, at the first supper which followed our intimacy, he saw her enter. He ran to meet her like a child, and gave a cry of joy, which must have been very pleasing to the maréchale.

«You are a dear woman,» he said to her, with an air which accorded with his words, «I always find you when I want you; and you can nowhere be more in place than here. I ask your friendship for our dear countess.»

«She has it already, sire, from the moment I saw her; and I consider my intimacy with her as one of the happiest chances of my life.»

The king showed the utmost good humor in the world during the rest of the evening. He scolded me, however, for the mystery I had made in concealing from him the agreeable visit of the maréchale. I justified myself easily by the pleasure which this surprise caused him; and, on my side, gave my sincere thanks to the chancellor.

«You owe me none,» said he; «the good maréchale felt herself somewhat ill at ease not to be on close terms with her who possesses the affections of the king. It is an indispensable necessity that she should play a part in the lesser apartments; and as the principal character no longer suits her, she is contented to perform that of confidante, and ran here on my first intimation.»

«Never mind the motive that brought her,» I said; «she is a companion for me much more desirable than madame de Bearn.»

« First from her rank," said the chancellor, smiling maliciously, « and then by virtue of her cousinship with the Holy Virgin."

I confess that I was ignorant of this incident in the house of Levi; and I laughed heartily at the description of the picture, in which one of the lords of this house is represented on his knees before the mother of God, who says to him, « *Rise, cousin* » ; to which he replies, « *I know my duty too well, cousin.*" I took care, however, how I joked on this point with the maréchale, who listened to nothing that touched on the nobility of the ancestors of her husband or on those of her own family.

Great had been the outcry in the palace against the duc de la Vauguyon and madame de Bearn, but how much louder did it become on the defection of the marquise de Mirepoix. The cabal was destroyed; for a woman of rank and birth like the maréchale was to me a conquest of the utmost importance. The princesse de Gueménée and the duchesse de Grammont were wofully enraged. This they manifested by satirical sneers, epigrams, and verses, which were put forth in abundance. All these inflictions disturbed her but little; the main point in her eyes was to possess the favor of the master; and she had it, for he felt that he was bound to her by her complaisance.

He was not long in giving her an unequivocal proof of his regard. The duc de Duras asked her, in presence of the king and myself, why she did not wear her diamonds as usual.

« They are my representatives," was her reply.

« What do you mean by representatives ? » said I.

« Why, my dear countess, they are with a Jew instead of my sign-manual. The rogue had no respect for the word of a relation of the Holy Virgin and the daughter of the Beauvau. I was in want of thirty thousand francs; and to procure it I have given up my ornaments, not wishing to send to the Jew the old plate of my family, altho' the hunks wanted it."

We all laughed at her frankness, and the gaiety with which she gave this statement, but we went no further;

to her great regret, no doubt, for I believe that the scene had been prepared between her and M. de Duras, either to let her profit in time of need, or else that she wished to pluck a feather from our wing. When I was alone with the king, he said,

« The poor maréchale pains me; I should like to oblige her and think I will give her five hundred louis.»

«What will such a petty sum avail her? You know what she wants; either send her the whole or none. A king should do nothing by halves.»

Louis XV. answered me nothing; he only made a face, and began to walk up and down the room. « Ah,» said I, «this excellent woman loves your majesty so much, that you ought to show your gratitude to her, were it only to recompense her for her intimacy with me.»

«Well, you shall carry her the sum yourself, which Lebel shall bring you from me. But thirty thousand francs, that makes a large pile of crown-pieces.»

«Then I must take it in gold.»

«No, but in good notes. We must not, even by a look, intimate that she has *sold* her visits to us. There are such creatures in the world!»

The next morning Lebel brought me a very handsome rose-colored portfolio, embroidered with silver and auburn hair: it contained the thirty thousand francs in notes. I hastened to the maréchale. We were then at Marly.

«What good wind blows you hither?» said madame de Mirepoix.

«A royal gallantry,» I replied; «you appeared unhappy, and our excellent prince sends you the money necessary to redeem your jewels.»

The eyes of the lady became animated, and she embraced me heartily. « It is to you that I owe this bounty of the king.»

«Yes, partly, to make the present entire; he would only have given you half the sum.»

« I recognize him well in that he does not like to empty his casket. He would draw on the public treasury without hesitation for double the revenue of France, and would not make a division of a single crown of his own private *peculium.*"

I give this speech *verbatim;* and this was all the gratitude which madame de Mirepoix manifested towards Louis XV. I was pained at it, but made no remark. She took up the portfolio, examined it carefully, and, bursting into a fit of laughter, said, while she flung herself into an arm-chair,

"Ah! ah! ah! this is an unexpected rencontre! Look at this portfolio, my dear friend: do you see the locks with which it is decorated? Well, they once adorned the head of madame de Pompadour. She herself used them to embroider this garland of silver thread; she gave it to the king on his birthday. Louis XV. swore never to separate from it, and here it is in my hands."

Then, opening the portfolio, and rummaging it over, she found in a secret pocket a paper, which she opened, saying, "I knew he had left it."

It was a letter of madame de Pompadour, which I wished to have, and the maréchale gave me it instantly; the notes remained with her. I copy the note, to give you an idea of the sensibility of the king.

"SIRE, —*I am ill; dangerously so, perhaps. In the melancholy feeling which preys upon me, I have formed a desire to leave you a souvenir, which will always make me present to your memory. I have embroidered this portfolio with my own hair; accept it: never part with it. Enclose in it your most important papers, and let its contents prove your estimation of it. Will you not accord my prayer? Sign it, I beseech you; it is the caprice, the wish of a dying woman.*"

Beneath it was written,

"*This token of love shall never quit me.* LOUIS."

CHAPTER XVII.

Conversation of the maréchale de Mirepoix with the comtesse du Barry on court friendship — Intrigues of madame de Bearn — Preconcerted meeting with madame de Flaracourt — Rage of madame de Bearn — Portrait and conversation of madame de Flaracourt with the comtesse du Barry — Insult from the princesse de Gueménée — Her banishment — Explanation of the king and the duc de Choiseul relative to madame du Barry — The comtesse d'Egmont.

HOWEVER giddy I was I did not partake in the excessive gaiety of madame de Mirepoix. I was pained to see how little reliance could be placed on the sensibility of the king, as well as how far I could esteem the consideration of the maréchale for madame de Pompadour, from whom she had experienced so many marks of friendship. This courtier baseness appeared to me so villainous, that I could not entirely conceal how I was affected with displeasure. Madame de Mirepoix saw it, and, looking at me attentively, said,

« Do you feel any desire to become pathetical in the country we live in? I warn you that it will be at your own expense. We must learn to content ourselves here with appearances, and examine nothing thoroughly. »

« There is then no reality? » said I to her.

« Yes, » she answered me, « but only two things, power and money: the rest is 'leather and prunella' (*contes bleus*): no person has time to love sincerely; it is hatred only that takes deep root and never dies. To hope to give birth to a real passion, an Orestean and Pyladean friendship, is a dream from which you must be awakened. »

« Then you do not love me? »

« You ask me a very awkward question, my darling, I can tell you. I do love you, and very much, too: I have proved it by ranging myself on your side, and by declaring, with the utmost frankness, that I would rather see you in the situation in which you are, than any other woman of the court. But there is a long space between this and heroical friendship: I should deceive you if I were to affirm the contrary, and there would be no common sense in giving faith to my words. Every one has too much business, too much intrigue, too many quarrels on hand, to have any leisure to think of others: every one lives for himself alone. Mesdames de Gueménée and de Grammont appear very intimate: that is easily explained, they unite against a common enemy. But were your station left vacant, no sooner would the king have thrown the apple to one of them, but the other would detest her instantly."

Contrary to custom I made no reply: I was absorbed in painful reflections to which this conversation had given rise. The maréchale perceived it, and said,

"We should fall into philosophy if we probed this subject too deeply. Let us think no more of this: besides, I have a new defection to tell you of. Madame de Flaracourt told me yesterday that she much regretted having misunderstood you, and that you were worth more than all those who persecute you. She appeared to me disposed to ally herself to you for the least encouragement which you might be induced to hold out to her."

"You know very well," I replied, "that I am willing to adopt your advice. The house of Flaracourt is not to be despised, and I ask no better than to be on amicable terms with the lady."

"Well, then, come this morning and walk in the grove nearest the pavilion, I shall be there with madame de Flaracourt: we will meet by *chance*, compliments will follow, and the alliance will be formed."

The maréchale and I had scarcely separated when madame de Bearn was announced. This lady besieged me night and day. Gifted with a subtle and penetrating spirit — that talent which procures advancement at court, she saw, with pain, that I sought to attract other females about me: she would fain have remained my only friend, that she might, unopposed, influence me in all I did. She saw, therefore, the appearance of madame de Mirepoix in my drawing-room with uneasiness: her bad humor was sufficiently apparent to attract the notice of the maréchale, who laughed at it: her social position as a titled woman, and the king's friendship, giving her confidence that her credit would always exceed that of my godmother.

Madame de Bearn was compelled to submit to the ascendancy of the maréchale, but yet did not the less relax in her efforts to keep from me all other female society, she hoped that at last the king would distinguish her, and call her into his intimacy as my friend; she was not more fond of the comtesse d'Aloigny, altho' the nullity of this lady need not have alarmed her much. For me, I began to resent the irksomeness of having incessantly at my side a person who manifested too openly her desire to compel me to submit to her wishes, and I waited, to secure my freedom, only until the circle of females I could admit to my society should be extended.

Such were our reciprocal feelings during our stay at Marly. The madame de Bearn watched me with more care than at Versailles, fearing, no doubt, that the freedom of the country might facilitate connections prejudicial to her interests. Little did she anticipate on this day the stroke which was in preparation for her. I asked her spitefully to take a turn with me into the park, and I took care not to announce the meeting which we had arranged.

Behold us then walking this way and that, quite by chance, without however going any distance from the pavilion. Madame de Bearn, not liking the vicinity of the château, was desirous to go into the wood. I declined this under vain excuses, when suddenly madame de Mirepoix and madame de Flaracourt appeared at the end of a very short walk.

« Let us turn this way, » said the countess to me, « here comes one of our enemies, whom it would be as well to avoid. »

"Why turn away?" I replied; "she is alone, we are two, and then the maréchale de Mirepoix is not opposed to us."

Saying this, I advanced towards them. Madame de Flaracourt appeared very gracious: I replied to her advances with due politeness, and instead of separating, we continued to walk about together. Madame de Bearn saw clearly that chance was not the sole cause of this meeting: she dissembled as well as she could. I afterwards learnt that she owed me a spite, particularly for the mystery which I had made of this occurrence. The marked silence, and the sullen air she assumed during this interview, and which her sense and knowledge of the world should have prevented her from manifesting, proved to me, on this occasion, as on many others, that temper cannot always be conquered, and that at times it will burst forth in spite of the experience and caution of the courtier.

I did not give myself much trouble on this subject: I had well recompensed the good offices of the countess: I had ample proof that in serving me she had acted on the impulse of self-interest: we were quits, I thought, and I saw no reason why I should remain isolated just to serve her pleasure.

When we returned to my apartments I saw plainly, by her mutterings, her sighs, and the shrugging of her shoulders, that she was deeply irritated at what had just taken place. She was desirous of provoking an explanation, but as that could only tend to her disadvantage, she contented herself with leaving me earlier than her usual want, without saying anything disagreeable. Her custom was not to leave me alone, and her abrupt departure confirmed me in the idea I had imbibed, that this sort of comedy had much thwarted her.

In the course of the same day I received a visit from the comtesse de Flaracourt. This lady, whose sparkling eyes shone with an air of mischief, presented herself to me with an appearance of openness and confidence which completely cloaked the malignity and treachery of her character. She threw her arms round my neck with as much grace as tenderness, and taking my hand, as if to arrest my attention, said:

«I ought, madame, to explain to you the delay that I have made before I introduce myself to you, as well as the promptitude of this my first visit. I was prejudiced against you, and had formed a false estimate of you. My *liaison* with mesdames d'Egmont, de Brionne, and de Grammont naturally placed me in the rank opposed to you: so much for what has passed. But I have seen you: I have studied you at a distance, as well as close, and I have recognised, without difficulty, the injustice of your enemies. I have been enraged with myself for having been deceived regarding you: I wish to repair my wrongs. Enlightened by the opinion of the maréchale de Mirepoix, I have not hesitated to approach you under her auspices, and our first meeting has so happily furnished me with an opportunity of appreciating you, that I would not delay any longer the pleasure of making you a personal avowal of my past sentiments, and of those with which you now inspire me.»

The tone in which madame de Flaracourt uttered these words was so gracious and so persuasive, that I could not resist the pleasure of embracing her. She returned my kiss with the same eagerness, and would not listen to my thanks.

«All is explained between us,» she continued, «let us forget the past, and let us do as if meeting for the first time to-day; we henceforward date this as the first of our acquaintance.»

«The affability with which you have presented yourself to me,» I replied, «does not permit me to believe that I have only known you from this morning; I am in an illusion which will only allow me to look on our recent alliance as an ancient friendship.»

After having exchanged some conversation of the same tenor, we talked of my situation as regarded the other females of the court.

«They hate you for two reasons,» said the countess: «in the first place, because you have made a conquest which all the world envies you; secondly because you are not one of us. There is not one family who can lean on you in virtue of the rights of blood, or alliances which stand instead of it. You have superseded a woman who more than any other could have a claim to your good fortune: she is sister to the prime minister, who has in her train, like Lucifer, more than a third part of heaven, for all the courtiers hang on her brother.

"On the other hand, we are not accustomed to remain so long in opposition to the will of the king. Such a resistance is not natural to us; it weighs upon us, it harms us, the favor of our master being our chief good. We are only something thro' him, and when combatting against him we have neither the courage nor the perseverance. Thus you may be very certain that the majority of women who oppose you do it against the grain: and if you add to this that they are incessantly exposed to the murmurs and complaints of their husbands, sons, brothers, and lovers, you will easily be convinced that they only aspire to finding a means of reconciling the regard they owe to the Choiseuls and the terror which they inspire, with the desire they have to seek your protection and the friendship of the king. The cabal only flies on one wing, and I cannot divine its situation at the commencement of the next winter. Do not disquiet yourself any more with what it can do: keep yourself quiet; continue to please the 'master,' and you will triumph over the multitude as easily as you have conquered the resistance of mesdames."

Such was the language of the comtesse de Flaracourt: it agreed, as you will perceive, with that of madame de Mirepoix, and I ought the more to believe it, as it was the fruit of their experience and profound knowledge of court manners. Their example proved to me, as well as their words, that all those who approached the king could not bear for a long time the position in which he placed those whom he did not look upon with pleasure. However, Louis XV. evinced more plainly from day to day the ascendancy I had over his mind. He assisted publicly at my toilet, he walked out with me, left me as little as possible, and sought by every attention to console me for the impertinences with which my enemies bespattered me. The following anecdote will prove to you how little consideration he had for those persons who dared to insult me openly.

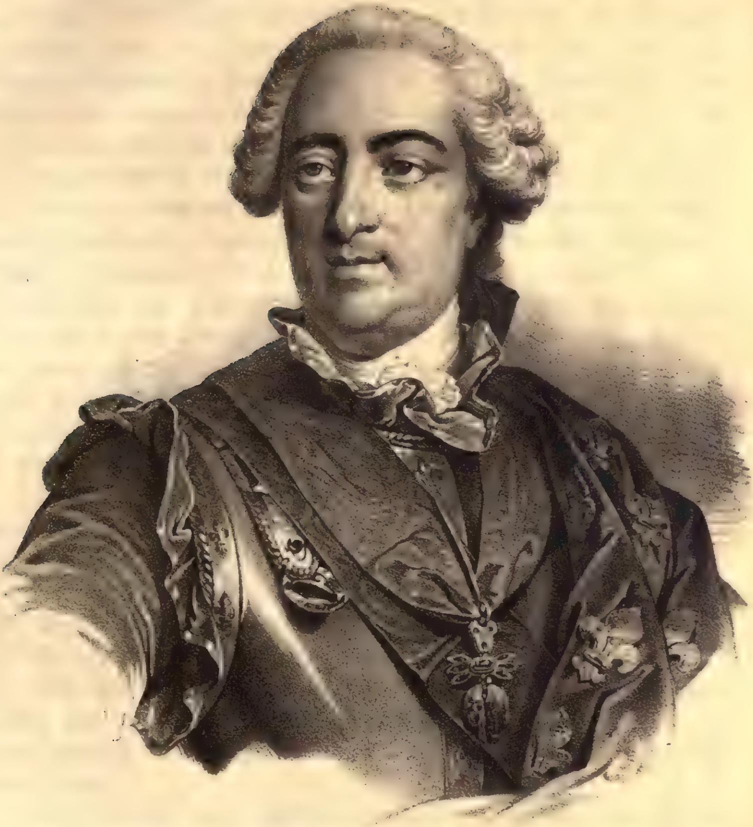
One day at Marly, I entered the drawing-room; there was a vacant seat near the princesse de Gueménée, I went to it, and scarcely was seated when my neighbor got up, saying, "What horror!" and betook herself to the further end of the room. I was much confused: the offence was too public for me to restrain my resentment, and even when I wished to do so the thing was scarcely possible. The comte Jean, who had witnessed it, and my sisters-in-law, who learnt it from him, were enraged. I was compelled to complain to the king, who instantly sent the princesse de Gueménée an order to quit Marly forthwith, and betake herself to the princesse de Marsan, *gouvernante* of the children of the royal family of France, of whose post she had the reversion.

Never did a just chastisement produce a greater effect. The outcry against me was louder than ever, it seemed as tho' the whole nobility of France was immolated at "one fell swoop." To have heard the universal clamor, it would have been thought that the princess had been sent to the most obscure prison in the kingdom. This proof of the king's regard for me did much mischief, no doubt, as it furnished my enemies with a pretext to accuse me of a vindictive spirit. Could I do otherwise? Ought I to have allowed myself to be overwhelmed with impunity, and was it consistent with the dignity of my august protector, that I should be insulted thus openly by his subjects, his courtiers, his guests, even in the private apartments of his palace?

However, this wrath of the nobility did not prevent the Choiseul family from experiencing a feeling of fright. They had just received a signal favor. The government of Strasbourg, considered as the key of France and Alsace, had been given in reversion to the comte de Stainville, brother of the duc de Choiseul. Certainly this choice was a very great proof of the indulgence of the king, and the moment was badly chosen to pay with ingrati-

LOUIS THE FIFTEENTH

From the portrait by Ferrand, 1760



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tude a benefit so important. This did not hinder the duchesse de Grammont, and all the women of her house, or who were her allies, from continuing to intrigue against me. It was natural to believe that the king would not permit such doing for a long time, and that should he become enraged at them, that I should attempt to soothe his anger.

Matters were in this state, when one morning, after his accustomed routine, the duc de Choiseul requested a private audience of the king. « I grant it this moment,» said the prince, « what have you to say to me ? »

« I wish to explain to your majesty how excessively painful is the situation in which I am placed with regard to some of the members of my family. All the females, and my sister at their head, attack me about a quarrel which is strange to me, and with which I have declared I would not meddle.»

« You do well, monsieur le duc,» said the king, with cool gravity, « I am much vexed at all that is going on, and have resolved not to suffer it any longer.»

The decision of this discourse made a deep impression on M. de Choiseul: he sought to conceal it whilst he replied:

« It is difficult, sire, to make women listen to reason.»

« All are not unreasonable,» rejoined the king: « your wife, for instance, is a model of reason and wisdom: she has perfect control of herself. She is the wise woman of scripture.»

This flattery and justly merited eulogium, which the king made of the duchess whenever he found an opportunity, was the more painful to M. de Choiseul, as his conduct was not irreproachable towards a woman whose virtues he alone did not justly appreciate. It was a direct satire against his sister's conduct, whose ascendancy over him, her brother, the king well knew. He replied that the good behavior of his wife was the safeguard of his family, and he greatly regretted that the duchesse de Grammont had not a right to the same eulogium.

« I beg you,» said the prince, « to engage her to change her language, and to conduct herself with less boldness, if she would not have me force her to repent.»

« That, sire, is a mission painful to fulfil, and words very hard to convey to her.»

« So much the worse for her,» replied the king, elevating his voice, « if she bear any friendship for you, let her prove it in this particular: your interests should keep her mouth shut.»

The duke had no difficulty to comprehend the indirect menace implied: he instantly renewed his regrets for the *disagreeable* disturbances that had occurred.

« Add *insulting*,» said Louis XV. « I am content with you and your services, duke. I have just proved this to you, by giving your brother more than he could expect from me; but have not I the right to have my intimacies respected? It appears to me that if you spoke more decidedly in your family you would command more attention.»

« This makes me fear, sire, that your majesty does not believe me sincere in my expression of the regret which I just took the liberty to utter to your majesty.»

« *Mon Dieu*, monsieur le duc, you certainly do not like madame du Barry.»

« I neither like nor hate her, sire; but I see with trouble that she receives at her house all my enemies.»

« Whose fault is that if it be so? Your own; you, who would never visit her; she would have received you with pleasure, and I have not concealed from you the satisfaction I should have experienced.»

These last words made the duke start, his eyes became animated. After a moment's reflection he said to the king,

« Sire, is it indispensably necessary for the service of the state that I endeavor to attain the good-will of madame la comtesse du Barry?»

« No.»

« Well, then, sire, allow matters to remain as they are. It would cost me much to quarrel with my whole family, the more so as this sacrifice is not useful to you, and would in no wise alter my position with your majesty.»

However painful to the king such a determination might be, he did not allow the duke to perceive it; he dissembled the resentment he felt, and contented himself with saying,

« Duc de Choiseul, I do not pretend to impose chains on you; I have spoken to you as a friend rather than as a sovereign. Now I return to what was said at first, and accept with confidence the promise you make me not to torment a lady whom I love most sincerely.»

Thus ended a conversation from which the duke, with a less haughty disposition, might have extracted greater advantages and played a surer game. It was the last plank of safety offered in the shipwreck which menaced him. He disdained it: the opportunity of seizing it did not present itself again. I doubt not but that if he would have united himself freely and sincerely with me I should not have played him false. Louis XV., satisfied with his condescension in my behalf, would have kept him at the head of his ministry: but his pride ruined him, he could not throw off the yoke which the duchesse de Grammont had imposed on him: he recoiled from the idea of telling her that he had made a treaty of peace with me, and that was not one of the least causes of his disgrace.

The journey to Marly gave birth to a multitude of intrigues of persons who thought to wrap themselves up in profound mystery, and all whose actions we knew. The police were very active about the royal abodes, especially since the fatal deed of the regicide Damiens. To keep them perpetually on the watch, they were ordered watch attentively the amours of the lords and ladies of the court.

The daughter of the duc de Richelieu, the comtesse d'Egmont, whose age was no pretext for her follies, dearly liked low love adventures. She used to seek them out in Paris, when she could find none at Versailles. She was not, however, the more indulgent towards me. This lady was not always content with noble lovers, but sought them in all classes, and more than once, simple mortals, men of low order, obtained preference over demi-gods. Her conduct in this respect was the result of long experience. She used to go out alone, and traverse the streets of Paris. She entered the shops, and when her eye rested on a good figure, having wide shoulders, sinewy limbs, and a good looking face, she then called up all the resources of her mind to form and carry on an intrigue, of which the consequences, at first agreeable to him who was the object of it, terminated most frequently fatally. The following adventure will give you an idea of the talent of madame d'Egmont in this way, and how she got rid of her adorers when she had exhausted with them the cup of pleasure.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Intrigue of the comtesse d'Egmont with a shopman — His unhappy fate — The comtesse du Barry protects him — Conduct of Louis XV. upon the occasion — The young man quits France — Madame du Barry's letter to the comtesse d'Egmont — Quarrel with the maréchal de Richelieu.

THE comtesse d'Egmont was one day observed to quit her house attired with the most parsimonious simplicity; her head being covered by an enormously deep bonnet, which wholly concealed her countenance, and the rest of her person enveloped in a pelisse, whose many rents betrayed its long service. In this strange dress she traversed the streets of Paris in search of adventures. She was going, she said, wittily enough, « to return to the cits what her father and brother had so frequently robbed them of. » Chance having led her steps to the rue St. Martin, she was stopped there by a confusion of carriages, which compelled her first to shelter herself against the wall, and afterwards to take refuge in an opposite shop, which was one occupied by a linen-draper.

She looked around her with the eye of a connoisseur, and perceived beneath the modest garb of a shopman one of those broad-shouldered youths, whose open smiling countenance and gently tinged complexion bespoke a person whose simplicity of character differed greatly from the vast energy of his physical powers: he resembled the Farnese Hercules upon a reduced scale. The princess approached him, and requested to see some muslins, from which she selected two gowns, and after having paid for them, requested the master of the shop to send his shopman with them, in the course of half an hour, to an address she gave as her usual abode.

The comtesse d'Egmont had engaged an apartment on the third floor of a house in the rue Tiquetonne, which was in the heart of Paris. The porteress of the dwelling knew her only as madame Rossin: her household consisted of a housekeeper and an old man, both devoted to a mistress whose character they well understood, and to whom they had every motive to be faithful.

Here it was, then, that the lady hastened to await the arrival of the new object of her plebeian inclinations. Young Moireau (for such was the shopman's name) was not long ere he arrived with his parcel. Madame d'Egmont was ready to receive him: she had had sufficient time to exchange her shabby walking dress for one which bespoke both coquetry and voluptuousness; the softness of her smile, and the turn of her features announced one whose warmth of passions would hold out the most flattering hopes of success to him who should seek her love.

Madame Rossin and the young shopman were soon engaged in conversation, further animated by the bright glances sent direct from the eyes of madame to the unguarded heart of her admiring visitor. Emboldened by the graciousness of her manner, he presumed to touch her fair hand: the lady, in affected anger, rose, and commanded him to quit the house. The terrified youth fell at her feet, imploring pardon for his boldness, and then hastily quitted the room ere the feigned madame Rossin could pronounce the forgiveness he demanded. "The fool," was (doubtless) the princess's exclamation, "had he been brought up at court he would have conducted himself very differently."

This silliness of proceeding was, however, far from being displeasing to the princess: on the contrary, it seemed to increase her determination to prosecute the adventure. Accordingly, on the following day she hastened to resume her former walking dress, and in it to take the road which led to the rue St. Martin, and again to present herself as a customer at the linen-draper's shop. This time she purchased cloth for chemises. Indescribable and unspeakable was the joy of young Moireau, when, after having served the mistress of his thoughts, he heard her request of his master to allow the goods she had selected to be sent to her residence; and equally was he surprised that she omitted to name him as the person she wished should convey them. Nevertheless, as may be imagined, Moireau obtained possession of the parcel, and was soon on his way to the rue Tiquetonne, where he found the lady more languishing and attractive than before; and soon they were deep in the most earnest and interesting conversation. Moireau, who now saw that his boldness was not displeasing to the lady, became more and more presuming: true, his overtures were refused, but so gently, that it only fanned his flame; nor was it till after reiterated prayers that he succeeded in obtaining her promise to meet him on the following Sunday. The princess, like a skilful manœuvrer, reckoned upon the additional violence his ardor would receive from this delay. The affection with which she had inspired him would only gain strength by thus deferring the day for their next meeting, whilst he would have time to meditate upon the virtue as well as the charms of her he had won.

The long looked for Sunday at length arrived, and Moireau was first at the place of rendezvous. His simple dress augmenting his natural good looks, whilst the countess had spared no pains to rendered her appearance calculated to captivate and seduce. All reserve was thrown aside; and to satisfy the eager curiosity of her lover, she stated herself to be the widow of a country lawyer, who had come to Paris to carry on a lawsuit. It would be useless to follow the princess during the further course of this meeting. Suffice it to say, that Moireau and madame d'Egmont separated mutually happy and satisfied with each other.

The youth, who was now ages gone in love, had only reached his twenty-second year, and madame Rossin was his first attachment. So ardent and impetuous did his passion hourly grow, that it became a species of insanity. On the other hand, the high-born dame, who had thus captivated him, felt all the attractions of his simple and untutored love, further set off by the fine manly figure of the young shopman. Indeed, so much novelty and interest did she experience in her new amour, that, far from finding herself, as she had expected, disposed to relinquish the affair (as she had anticipated) at the end of two or three interviews, which she had imagined would have satisfied her capricious fancy, she put off, to an indefinite period, her original project of ending the affair by feigning a return to the country.

This resolution, however, she did not feel courage to carry into effect; and two or three months rolled rapidly away without any diminution of their reciprocal flame, when one fine Sunday evening Moireau, whose time hung heavily on his hands, took it into his head to visit the opera. This species of amusement constitutes the *ne plus ultra* of the delights of a French cit. Moireau seated himself in the pit, just opposite the box of the gentlemen in waiting. The performance was « Castor and Pollux. » At the commencement of the second act a sudden noise and bustle drew Moireau from the contemplative admiration into which the splendor of the piece had thrown him. The disturbance arose from a general move, which was taking place in the box belonging to the gentlemen in waiting. Madame d'Egmont had just arrived, attended by four or five grand lords of the court covered with gold, and decorated with the order of the Holy Ghost, and two ladies richly dressed, from whom she was distinguished as much by the superior magnificence of her attire as by her striking beauty.

Moireau could not believe his eyes; he felt assured he beheld madame Rossin, yet he fancied he must be under the influence of some fantastic dream; but every look, every gesture of the princess, a thousand trifles, which would have escaped the notice of a common observer, but which were engraved in indelible characters on the heart of her admirer, all concurred to assure him that he recognised in this lovely and dazzling female, so splendidly attired and so regally attended, the cherished mistress of his affections; she whom that very morning he had held in his embrace. He addressed a thousand questions to those about him, from whom he learnt his own good fortune and the exalted rank of her he had won. Scarcely could he restrain the burst of joy, when informed that the fair object, glittering with jewels and radiant in beauty, was the daughter of Richelieu, and the wife of one of the princes of the noble house of Egmont.

A thousand tumultuous and flattering ideas rushed in crowds to the brain of young Moireau, and he saw in anticipation a long and brilliant vista opening before him. Poor inexperienced youth! He mistook the wisest and safest path, which would have been to have appeared ignorant of the high rank of his mistress, and to have induced her, from motives of affection, to preside over his fortunes, and to rise by her means without allowing her to suspect he guessed her ability to bestow riches and preferment. He, on the contrary, hastened to her with the account of his having discovered her real rank and station. Madame d'Egmont, whose self-possession enabled her to conceal the terror and uneasiness his recital inspired her with, listened calmly and silently till he had ceased speaking, and then asked him, with a playful smile, if he was quite sure of being in his right senses? « For how otherwise could you," said she, « confuse a poor obscure widow like myself with the rich and powerful princess you speak of? My friend, you are under the influence of a dream; believe me, I am neither more nor less than poor widow Rossin, and can boast of no claim to the illustrious name of Egmont or Richelieu."

But the more she spoke the less she persuaded, and young Moireau was not to be reasoned out of his conviction of her identity with the high-born princess of Egmont, and he alternately employed threats and promises to induce her to confess the fact; but the lady was firm and immovable. Resolved at all risk to preserve her incognito, she found herself compelled to bring the affair to a conclusion, by feigning extreme anger at the pertinacity with which Moireau importuned her upon a subject which she protested she knew nothing: her lover retaliated, and a desperate quarrel ensued. Moireau rushed angrily from her presence, vowing that he would publish his adventure thro'out Paris; an empty threat, which his devotion to the princess would never have permitted him to carry into execution.

Madame d'Egmont, however, was not so sure that her secret was safe, and she lost not an instant in repairing to the house of M. de Sartines, to obtain from him a *lettre de cachet* against the aspiring shopman, who, seized in the street, was conveyed away, and confined as a maniac in a madhouse, where, but for a circumstance you shall hear, he would doubtless be still.

I happened to be with the king when the lieutenant of police arrived upon matters connected with his employment. According to custom, Louis inquired whether he had anything very amusing to communicate to him? «Many things, sire,» replied he, «and amongst others an anecdote of madame d'Egmont»; and he began to relate to us, word for word, what I have written you. The king laughed till he cried; as for me, altho' I could not help finding the tale sufficiently comic to induce risibility. I listened with more coolness; and when it was completed, I exclaimed,

«Can it be, sire, that you will permit this unfortunate young man to be the eternal victim of so unprincipled a woman?»

«What would you have me do?» said Louis; «how can I interfere without compromising the reputation of madame d'Egmont?»

«Allow me to say,» replied I, «that this fear ought not to prevent your majesty's interference. You are father of your subjects; and the respect you entertain for madame d'Egmont should not outweigh your duty, which imperatively calls upon you to command the release of this wretched young man.»

«But,» argued the king, «by such a step I shall for ever disoblige the duc de Richelieu and his family.»

«Fear it not,» cried I, «if your majesty will trust to me, I will undertake to bring the maréchal and his nephew to approve of your proceedings; and as for the rest of his family, let them go where they will; for the empire of the world I should be sorry to bear them company.»

This manner of speaking pleased the king; and, turning to M. de Sartines, « Lieutenant of police,» said he, « you have heard my fair chancellor; you will act in strict conformity with the orders she will transmit you from me.»

« Then take these orders now, sir,» said I: « in the first place, this ill-treated young Moireau must immediately be set at liberty, and my own police (for I must tell you I had them) will give me the faithful account of all your proceedings in this affair.»

The king comprehended my meaning. « You will keep a careful watch,» added he to M. de Sartines, « that no harm befalls this unfortunate youth, whom, I beg, you will discreetly recommend to quit France ere the malice of those who have reason to fear his reappearance works him some evil.»

« And who, sire,» asked I, « shall dare injure one whom your majesty deigns to honor with your protection?»

« Madame,» replied M. de Sartines, « even his majesty's high patronage cannot prevent a secret blow from some daring hand; a quarrel purposely got up; a beverage previously drugged; a fall from any of the bridges into the river; or, even the supposition of one found dead, having destroyed himself.»

« You make me shudder,» said I, « in thus unveiling the extent of human depravity. So, then, this young man, whose only fault appears to have been that of captivating the eyes of a noble lady, should perish in a dungeon, or save his life at the sacrifice of country, friends, connections; and all this for having listened to the passion of a woman, as licentious in manners as illustrious by birth: this frightful injustice rouses all my indignation. Well, then, since the power of the monarch of France is insufficient to protect his oppressed subject in his own realms, let him shield him from want in a foreign land, by allowing him a pension of one hundred louis. I will take upon myself to defray the expenses of his journey.»

Thus saying, I was hastening to the adjoining room, where stood my *secretaire*, to take from it a thousand crowns I wished to give for the purpose. The king held me back by my arm, saying to me,

« You are the most excellent creature I know of, but you see I am always master. I will undertake to provide for this young man. M. de Sartines, » pursued he, « I wish to secure to him a thousand crowns yearly; and, further, you will supply him with six thousand francs ready money, which M. de la Borde will repay to your order. *Now are you satisfied, Couci?* » said the king, turning to me.

My only reply was to throw my arms around his neck without ceremony, spite of the presence of a witness, who might blush at my familiarity. « You are indeed, » said I, « a really good prince; it is only a pity you will not assert your right to rule alone. »

« You are a little rebel, » cried he, « to doubt my absolute power. » This tone of playful gaiety was kept up some time after the departure of the lieutenant of police.

M. de Sartines returned next day to tell me that everything had been accomplished to my desire. « M. Moireau, » said he, « has left prison, and departs for Spain to-morrow morning: his intention is to join some friends of his at Madrid. He is informed of all he owes you, and entreats your acceptance of his most grateful and respectful acknowledgments. Will you see him? »

« That would be useless, » answered I; « say to him only, that I request he will write to me upon his arrival at Madrid, and give me the history of his late adventure in its fullest details. »

Moireau did not disappoint me; and so soon as his letter reached me I hastened to copy it, merely suppressing the date of the place from which it was written, and forwarded it immediately to the comtesse d'Egmont, with the following note:—

> «The many proofs of tender attachment with which the widow Rossin honored young Moireau make me believe that she will learn with pleasure of my having the good fortune to rescue the ill-fated youth from the cruelty of the comtesse d'Egmont. This interesting young man no longer groans a wretched prisoner in the gloomy abode that haughty lady had selected for him, but is at this minute

safe in a neighboring kingdom, under the powerful patronage of the king of France, who is in possession of every circumstance relative to the affair. I likewise know the whole of the matter, and have in my keeping the most irrefragable proofs of all that took place; and should I henceforward have any reason to complain of the comtesse d'Egmont, I shall publish these documents with permission of those concerned.

«The public will then be enabled to judge of the virtue and humanity of one who affects to treat me with a ridiculous disdain. There exists no law against a fair lady having lovers and admirers, but a stern one forbids her to command or procure their destruction. I KNOW ALL; and madame d'Egmont's future conduct will decide my silence and discretion. The affair with Moireau is not the only one, others of even a graver sin preceded it. I can publish the whole together; and, I repeat, my determination on this head depends wholly and entirely upon the manner in which madame d'Egmont shall henceforward conduct herself towards me. I beg madame de Rossin will allow me to subscribe myself, with every feeling she so well merits,

« Her very humble and most obedient servant,

« THE COMTESSE DU BARRY.»

I had communicated to no one the secret of this vengeance; I wished to keep the delight of thus exciting the rage of the princesse d'Egmont all to myself. I was certain, that whatever might henceforward be her line of conduct towards me, that whenever she found herself in my presence, she would bitterly feel the stings of an accusing conscience, and the gnawings of that worm which dieth not in the heart of hypocritical and wicked persons, more especially when compelled to meet the eye of those who could unmask them in a minute.

On the following day I received a visit from the duc de Richelieu. Spite of the many endeavors he made to appear smiling and good humored, a deep rage kept its station round his mouth, and contracted his lips even in the midst of the artificial smile with which he sought to dissimulate his wrath.

« Madame, good morning,» said he to me, « I come to offer my congratulations, you really are become quite one of us; upon my word, the most experienced courtier has nothing more to teach you.»

« I am as yet in ignorance of the cause to which I may ascribe these compliments, M. le Maréchal, which I greatly fear surpass my poor merits; and which even you will be compelled to retract them when I am better known to you."

"Fear it not, madame," said he, "your commencement is a master-stroke; and the letter you yesterday addressed to the comtesse d'Egmont — "

"Ah, sir," exclaimed I, with unfeigned astonishment, "in her place I certainly should not have selected you as my confidant in the affair."

"And who could she better have selected than her father? But that is not the matter in hand. My daughter is filled with anger against you; and if I must speak the truth, I do not think your behavior towards her quite what it should have been."

"Really, monsieur, I was not prepared for a reproach of this kind; and what can madame d'Egmont allege against me? 'Tis she who has pursued me with the most bitter sarcasms, the most determined malice; and, I may add, the most impertinent behavior. I entreat your pardon for using such strong expressions, but her behavior allows of none milder. And what have I done in my turn? snatched from a lingering death an unfortunate young man, whose only crime consisted in having pleased this unreasonable madame d'Egmont. I procured the king's protection for the miserable object of the princess's affection; I obtained his safe removal to another country; and, having done all this, I communicated my knowledge of the transaction to the comtesse d'Egmont. Does this bear any comparison with her line of conduct towards me?"

"But your letter, madame; your letter — "

"Would bear alterations and amendments, sir, I am aware: I admit I did not sufficiently insist upon the atrocity of such an abuse of power."

"You are then resolved, madame, to make us your enemies."

"I should be very sorry, monsieur le duc, to be compelled to such extremities; but if your friendship can only be purchased at the price of my submitting to continually receive the insults of your family, I should be the first to cease to aspire to it. If madame d'Egmont holds herself aggrieved by me, let her carry her complaint before the parliament; we shall then see what redress she will get. She has compromised the king's name by an arbitrary act; and since you thus attack me, you must not take it amiss if I make the king acquainted with the whole business."

The maréchal, surprised at so severe a reply, could no longer restrain the rage which filled him. "I should have thought, madame," said he, "that my daughter, in whose veins flows royal blood, might have merited some little consideration from the comtesse du Barry."

"It is well, then, monsieur le duc," replied I, "to point out to you your error. I see in my enemies their works and actions alone, without any reference to their birth, be it high or low; and the conduct of madame d'Egmont has been so violent and unceasing towards me, that it leaves me without the smallest regret for that I have pursued towards her."

I had imagined that this reply would still further irritate the angry feelings of the duc de Richelieu, but it did not: he easily guessed that nothing but the king's support could have inspired me to express myself with so much energy; and, if paternal vanity strove in his heart, personal interests spoke there with even a louder voice. He therefore sought to lay aside his anger, and, like a skilful courtier, changing his angry look and tone for one of cheerfulness:

"Madame," said he, "I yield; I see it will not do to enter the lists against you. I confess I came this morning but to sound your courage, and already you have driven me off the field vanquished. There is one favor I would implore of your generosity, and that is, to be silent as to all that has transpired."

"I shall not speak of it, monsieur le duc," replied I, much moved, "unless you or madame d'Egmont set me the example."

"In that case the affair will for ever remain buried in oblivion; but, madame, I will not conceal from you, that my daughter has become your most bitter and irreconcilable enemy."

“The motives which have actuated me, monsieur le maréchal, are such as to leave me very little concern upon that subject. I flatter myself this affair will not keep you away from *me*, who would fain reckon as firmly on your friendship as you may do on mine.”

The marechal kissed my hand in token of amity, and from that moment the matter was never mentioned.

A similar scene had already occurred with the prince de Soubise, relative to the exile of his daughter. Was it not somewhat strange, as well as unjust, that all the noblemen of the day wished to preserve to their relations the right of offending me with impunity, without permitting me even the right of defending myself.

CHAPTER XIX.

Madame du Barry separates from madame de Bearn — Letters between these ladies — Portrait of madame de l'Hôpital — The ladder — The bell — Conversation with madame de Mirepoix — First visit to Chantilly — Intrigues to prevent the countess from going thither — The king's displeasure towards the princesses — The archbishop de Senlis.

THE spoiled child of fortune, I had now attained the height of my wishes. The king's passion augmented daily, and my empire became such as to defy the utmost endeavors of my enemies to undermine it. Another woman in my place would have employed her power in striking terror amongst all who were opposed to her, but for my own part I contented myself with repulsing their attempts to injure me, and in proceeding to severity only when my personal interests were too deeply concerned to admit of my passing the matter over in silence.

There was no accusation too infamous to be laid to my charge; amongst other enormities they scrupled not to allege that I had been the murderess of Lebel, the king's *valet-de-chambre*, who died by poison! Was it likely, was it probable that I should seek the destruction of him to whom I owed my elevation, the most devoted of friends, and for whom my heart cherished the most lively sense of gratitude? What interest could I possibly derive from the perpetration of such a crime? The imputation was too absurd for belief, but slander cares little for the seeming improbability of such an event. The simple fact remained that Lebel was dead, of course the cruel and unjust consequence became in the hands of my enemies, that I had been the principal accessory to it.

My most trifling actions were misrepresented with the same black malignity. They even made it a crime in me to have written to madame de Bearn, thanking her for her past kindnesses, and thus setting her at liberty to retire from the mercenary services she pretended to have afforded me. And who could blame me for seeking to render myself independent of her control, or for becoming weary of the tyrannical guidance of one who had taken it into her head that I had become her sole property, and who, in pursuance of this idea, bored and tormented me to death with her follies and exactions, and even took upon herself to be out of humor at the least indication of my attaching myself to any other lady of the court. According to her view of things, gratitude imposed on me the rigorous law of forming an intimacy with her alone; in a word, she exercised over me the most galling dominion, which my family had long counselled me to shake off; in truth, I was perfectly tired of bearing the yoke her capricious and overbearing temper imposed upon me, but I determined, if possible, to do nothing hastily, and to endure it with patience as long as I could. But now that the number of my female friends was augmented by the addition of the marquise de Montmorency and the comtesse de l'Hôpital I determined no longer to bear the constant display of madame de Bearn's despotic sway, and finding no chance of accommodating our tastes and humors, I resolved to free myself from her thraldom. Another powerful reason for this measure was the dislike with which the king regarded her; not that she was deficient in birth or good breeding, but amidst the polish of high life she occasionally introduced the most vulgar and provincial manners, a fault of all others most offensive to the king, whose disgust was further excited by the undisguised avidity with which, at every opportunity, she sought to turn her admission to the king's private society to account, by preferring some request or soliciting some particular favor. Instead of giving herself up to the joy and hilarity that reigned around, she seemed always on the watch to seize every possible advantage to herself. Immediately that the king was apprized of my intention of dismissing her from any further cares for me, "You are quite right," said he, "to get rid of this troublesome woman, who never visits us without calculating the degree of interest she can derive from it, and seems to me, whenever she approaches me, as tho' she were devising some fresh petition to obtain from me. And now, too, that the first ladies of the court fill your drawing-rooms, why should you endure her importunate presence?»

Strengthened by these sentiments on the king's part, I lost no time in writing to madame de Bearn a letter, of which many false copies were circulated; however, I subjoin the following as the veritable epistle addressed by me to the countess: —

«MADAME,—It would be the height of selfishness on my part to tax further the kindness and attention you have been pleased to show me. I am well aware how many public and private duties claim your care, and I therefore (with much regret) beg to restore to you that liberty you have so generously sacrificed to my interests. Conscious of the ennui which oppresses you in this part of the country, I write to entreat that you will allow no consideration connected with me to detain you longer in a place so irksome, but, since our visit to Marly is concluded, fly upon the wings of impatience to the gay scenes of Paris and Luxembourg. Be assured that it will at all times afford me much pleasure to evince the gratitude with which I shall ever remain,

«Madame, yours sincerely,
«THE COMTESSE DU BARRY.»

«P. S. I am commissioned to entreat your acceptance of the accompanying casket; it is the gift of one whose favors are never refused; you will easily guess to whom I allude, and I doubt not bring yourself to conform to the usual custom.»

The jewels sent were a pair of ear-rings and an *agrafe* of emeralds encircled with diamonds. The king was desirous of bestowing upon madame de Bearn this particular mark of his recollection of her services towards me, but it did not allay the indignation with which she expressed her sense of my bitter ingratitude, as she termed it, as tho' her interested co-operation had not been sufficiently repaid. Nevertheless, she forbore to come to a decided quarrel with me, but satisfied herself with loading me with every reproach in private, whilst she wrote to thank me for all the favors I had bestowed upon her, and entreated I would keep her remembrance alive in the mind of my royal protector.

As there was nothing offensive in the style of the letter I showed it to the king; when he came to the part where madame de Bearn recommended herself to his kind recollection, and expressed her desire to be permitted to throw herself once more at his feet, « Heaven preserve me,» cried he, « from receiving this mark of the lady's respect. No, no, she is bad enough at a distance; I should be bored to death were she so near to me as she prays for. Thank God we have got rid of her, and now trust to your own guidance; try the powers of your own wings to bear you in safety, I feel persuaded you will never be at a loss.»

About this time the prince de Soubise, anxious to evince that he no longer retained any feelings of coolness towards me, requested his mistress, madame de l'Hôpital, to call upon me. This lady, without being a regular beauty, was yet very attractive. She was past the meridian of her charms, but what she wanted in youth she amply compensated for by the vivacity and brilliancy of her conversation, as well as the freedom of her ideas, which made her the idol of all the old libertines of the court. The prince de Soubise was greatly attached to her, and preferred her in reality, to mademoiselle Guimard, whom he only retained for form's sake, and because he thought it suitable to his dignity to have an opera dancer in his pay; this nobleman (as you will find) had rather singular ideas of the duties attached to his station.

Madame de l'Hôpital had had a vast number of gallant adventures, which she was very fond of relating. I shall mention two of the most amusing, which will serve to convey an idea of the skilfulness and ready wit with which she extricated herself from the most embarrassing circumstances.

A young man, whose love she permitted, whose name was the chevalier de Cressy, was obliged, in order to visit her, to scale a terrace upon which a window opened, which conducted to the sleeping-room of his mistress. He was generally accompanied by his valet, a good-looking youth, who, disliking a state of idleness, had contrived to insinuate himself into the good graces of the lady's maid. The valet, during his master's stay with madame, had likewise ascended the terrace, and penetrated, by the aid of another window, into the chamber where reposed the object of his tender love. All this was accomplished with as little noise as possible, in order to prevent the mischance of awakening the marquis de l'Hôpital, who was quietly asleep in an adjoining room.

One clear moonlight night, at the very instant when M. de Cressy was about to step out of the window, in order to return to his own apartment, a terrible crash of broken glass was heard. The terrified chevalier sought the aid of his ladder, but it had disappeared. Not knowing what to do, the chevalier returned to madame de l'Hôpital, who, seized with terror, had only just time to conceal him in her chamber, when the marquis opened his window to ascertain the cause of all this confusion. In an instant the alarm spread, and heads were popped out of the different windows of the castle, each vieing with the other in vociferating «Thieves! thieves! murder! fire!»

The unfortunate author of all this disturbance was the unlucky valet; who, in his overeagerness to reach his Dulcinea, had attempted to climb his ladder so nimbly, that it fell down, and, striking against the windows of a room near which he had fixed it, had broken several panes of glass. The poor valet never stopped to replace the ladder; but, terrified as well as hurt by his rapid descent, scrambled off as well as he could, abandoning his master in his present critical situation.

The ladder thrown down in the courtyard was abundant proof that some audacious attempt had been made upon the lives and safety of the inhabitants of the castle; and the general determination was to catch the thieves; for, it was presumed, as no outlet for their escape was discernible, that they must be concealed within its walls. The servants, with their master at their head, were speedily assembled for the purpose, when the absence of the chevalier de Cressy was observed. Where could he be? was the general wonder. Was it possible that, amidst the universal uproar with which the castle had resounded, he had slept so soundly as to be yet unconscious of all this bustle? An over-officious friend was upon the point of going to his chamber, to ascertain the cause of his absenting himself at such a moment, when madame de l'Hôpital sent to request her husband would come to her immediately. « Sir, » said she, when they were alone, « the disturbance which has thus broken our rest is not the work of thieves, but originates in the shameless licentiousness of a man unworthy of his name and the rank he occupies. The chevalier de Cressy, forgetful of his being your guest, and of respecting the honor of all beneath your roof, has dared to carry on a base intrigue with my woman, in whose apartment you will find him at this very minute. A conduct so profligate and insulting fills me with an indignation which I think that you, sir, after what you have heard, cannot but partake. »

The marquis de l'Hôpital, who did not see the thing in the same serious light, sought to appease the virtuous indignation of his lady, and went himself to release the chevalier from his place of concealment; leading him thro' his own apartment to join the crowd of armed servants, who, as may be supposed, were unable to detect the supposed invaders of their repose.

On the following morning the chevalier as agreed upon, wrote a penitential letter to madame, entreating her pardon for his improper attentions to her servant, whom she affected to dismiss with every mark of gravest displeasure. The weeping Abigail threw herself at the feet of her mistress; and the compassionate marquis (before whom the scene was enacted), touched with pity, implored his lady to receive the afflicted and penitent Javotte once more into her service. This was at length granted to his solicitations; and Javotte received a hundred louis as the price of her silence, and found it sufficient compensation for the bad opinion the marquis entertained of her virtue.

The second trick the marchioness played her husband was not less amusing.

The chevalier de Cressy and herself could not meet so frequently as both desired; and whilst suffering under the void occasioned by his absence, chance threw in her way a young relative of her husband's, a youth of about eighteen, as beautiful as Love, and as daring as that god. They were then in the country during the fine days of summer, and both time and place were favorable to the prosecution of their growing passion. One day madame de l'Hôpital and her cousin were sauntering about the park heedless of the approaching dinner-hour, and equally deaf to the sound of the dinner-bell, which rung its accustomed peal in vain for them whose ears were occupied in listening to sweeter sounds. At length the master of the house, alarmed at the protracted absence of his wife and friend, went himself, attended by many guests assembled at his house, in search of the stray ones; the servants likewise received orders to disperse themselves over the grounds in different directions; and madame de l'Hôpital and her companion were only aroused to a recollection of the flight of time by hearing their names loudly shouted by a dozen different voices. Fortunately they were just in time to separate in opposite paths, and thus to enter the castle without any suspicion being excited of their having been so recently in each other's company. The marquis angrily remonstrated with his lady for having obliged him to send in search of her, and she excused herself by protesting that she had not heard the dinner-bell. The marquis replied, that the thing was impossible; and after some angry discussion the matter rested there.

A few days after this the marchioness, with her husband and cousin, were rambling over the grounds, when they found themselves at the entrance of a hermitage, where madame de l'Hôpital had told the marquis she had sat down to rest herself on the day of her failing to attend the dinner-hour. M. de l'Hôpital resumed the dispute, by protesting that from this situation the dinner-bell might easily be heard: the lady continued firm in protesting it could not; till, at last, feigning extreme anger, she exclaimed, "Well then, sir, since you refuse to believe *my* assertion, go yourself and ring the bell as loudly as you please, your cousin will remain here with me, and determine if it be possible to distinguish the sound from here." The fool of a marquis set off in the height of his zeal to convince his wife, and, arrived at the turret where the bell was placed, began ringing it with all his might and main, leaving the lovers the undisturbed opportunity they were not slow in taking advantage of. When the marquis had ceased his chimes, the loving pair went to meet him.

"Well, my good cousin," inquired he, as they approached, "which of us was right? Could you hear it or not?"

"Yourself, most assuredly," replied the young man, not without a slight blush. "I can assure you that both madame and myself heard the bell the whole time you were ringing it."

"There, I told you so; I told you so"; cried the delighted husband, triumphantly rubbing his hands.

I thought when this lively and piquant adventure was related to me, that it was well worthy of being immortalized by the pen of a La Fontaine. The marchioness gave these anecdotes with a grace and talent peculiarly her own; and I sometimes imagined that some of the many she favored us with had perhaps taken place in a more recent period than that she assigned to them; and that, in order to divert our suspicions as to who were the real actors, she frequently substituted the *past* for what should have been with more correctness the *present* time. With manners so calculated to win, she could not fail being a delightful companion, altho' in my heart I could not help giving the preference to the society of the maréchale de Mirepoix.

Besides, the preference evinced by this lady in so generously separating herself from all her family, in order to attach herself to me, was not without its full value in my eyes. I knew myself to be generally disliked by her brother and sister-in-law, the prince and princesse de Beauvau, the latter of whom was secretly the mistress of the duc de Choiseul, over whom she exercised an equal empire with the duchesse de Grammont, and I was every day the object of some fresh attack on their part. I used sometimes to complain of this to the maréchale. "My dear friend," she would reply, "I am sorry, but cannot help it; in the midst of times such as we live in, and in such a court too, the prince de Beauvau aspires to be a noble Roman, and would fain be the Cato of his country at least. When I recommend to him a greater degree of prudence, he talks to me of virtue, as tho' at Versailles duty did not consist in implicit obedience to the wishes of our royal master; either obedience or absence from court is the golden rule laid down, from which none dare deviate. As to my sister-in-law she aims at the heroic likewise, altho her models are formed from another school; in fact, she has pored over the romances of Cyrus, Cassander, and Clelia, till she is half bewildered, and holds forth upon the virtues of these famous heroines, till I am frequently upon the point of exclaiming, 'Ah, my dear, it is all very fine; but Clelia and Mandane would not have shared their bed with the duc de Choiseul.'"

By these lively sallies the maréchale succeeded in diverting my anger from her relations, and I generally forgot my resentment in a hearty fit of laughter, brought on by her sprightly conversation. I found myself become daily more attached to her, and her presence helped to console me for the many vexations I continually encountered.

The greatest disagreeableness I encountered was occasioned by the capricious behavior of the princesses, who sometimes received me with pleasure and at others evinced a disposition to annoy me in every possible way, according as it suited the whims and wishes of those about them. The following may serve as an instance of their versatility.

The prince de Condé having announced his intention of giving a grand fête at Chantilly, the princesses declared they would not be present if I were there. The prince de Condé, spite of his claims to the character of a great man, was nevertheless one of the most subtle courtiers; and as soon as he was informed of the princesses' intention, he came, without ceremony, to explain the matter to me. This was the first visit he had honored me with. « Madame, » said he, « I had flattered myself you would have embellished Chantilly with your presence; but the beauties of the court, too justly alarmed at the idea of being eclipsed by your dazzling charms, have so successfully manœuvred, that they have wrought upon the royal daughters of our august monarch to declare, that the beauty of their attending nymphs shall not be effaced by yours. You have too much good sense to see the affair in any but its true light; and the disappointment your absence will inflict on me would be too cruelly felt for endurance, did I not seek to pacify my anxious wishes on the subject, by obtaining your promise to pay me a visit when the king next honors Chantilly with his presence. »

I felt deeply flattered by the invitation. The prince continued to pay me several elegant and gallant compliments; and I was, upon the whole, charmed with our interview. However, the king was highly displeased with his daughters' proceedings. « I have a great inclination, » said he, « to forbid their going to Chantilly at all. Upon my word, if I were to listen to them, they would fain make of me the same puppet they allow themselves to become in the hands of the greatest simpleton who will take the trouble of leading them. »

I endeavored to appease his anger, by reminding him, that he could not expect perfection from his daughters; and that, forced as they were to hear me continually spoken ill of by my enemies, it was next to impossible they should be able to prevent themselves from adopting the opinion of those around them. « And that, » said he, « is what I principally find fault with. What have they to do with aping the tone of those about them; and what point of their duty teaches them to detest those whom I love? I will take care to let them know my displeasure. »

All my endeavors were in vain; I could obtain no change of his purpose; and, summoning the archbishop de Senlis, he spoke to him in a manner that plainly evinced his intention of making him responsible for the actions of the princesses. Poor M. de Roquelaure called all the saints in paradise to witness his innocence.

« Silence, sir,» exclaimed the king, « I am perfectly certain this affair has not gone on without your knowledge, and probable participation. I know you well for a person devoted to the ladies, as a gay, gallant gentleman need be: I know likewise that you expend the revenues of your bishopric and livings upon the prettiest girls of Paris; thus I can hardly suppose you would have counselled my daughters' conduct. No, I blame those wicked and vindictive scandal-mongers, whose age is their only protection, and those intriguing men who beset my daughters' ears.»

« Sire,» protested the trembling bishop, « I entreat you to believe I am innocent of the whole affair.»

« Sir,» interrupted the king, « I know well that you are as good a courtier as a prelate, but still I believe you merely ape your betters; and far from entertaining any personal dislike to the comtesse du Barry, you would not object to receive either the archbishopric of d'Albi or Sens from her hands, were they in her power to bestow.»

The conversation went on in this style for more than half an hour. The king, who had amused himself highly at the terror of the bishop, left off in excellent humor.

This interview had not been productive of equal amusement to M. de Roquelaure, whose self-love had been deeply humbled by the way in which the king had spoken. No sooner did he feel himself at liberty, than he hastened to communicate to the princesses the violent displeasure they had excited; and these ladies, so brave and daring whilst their father appeared to offer no show of authority or anger, durst proceed no further when they heard of his seriously disapproving of it; and they felt the full inconsistency of their conduct, in first admitting me into their presence, and then refusing to meet me at any other place. The consequence of their deliberation upon the subject was to depute the bishop de Senlis to call upon me. This accommodating prelate discharged his mission with the utmost amenity, presenting me with the united compliments of the royal sisters, who all joined in requesting the pleasure of meeting me at Chantilly. Had not the prince de Condé held out the flattering prospect of giving me a fête wholly to myself, in all probability I should have profited by their invitation; but knowing of the secret intention of the prince, I returned for answer, « that it was sufficiently flattering and gratifying to me, to find that I still preserved any portion of the princesses' kind favor, but that I was abundantly honored by the intimation of my presence being agreeable. Nevertheless, as I had good authority for conjecturing that it might not be equally so to many of the ladies of their court, I should abstain from giving offence to any one by my presence.»

« Ah, madame,» cried M. de Roquelaure, « I entreat of you not to insist upon my carrying the latter part of this message to the princesses, they would be so much grieved.»

« Well, then, sir,» said I, « tell them that I am indisposed, and that the state of my health will detain me at Versailles.»

« That indeed,» said he, « is a more respectful message; and further I would venture to ask of your goodness, that since it is not your pleasure to honor Chantilly with your presence, that you will have the kindness to mention in the proper quarter, that far from my royal ladies opposing any obstacle to your going, they would have been much delighted with your presence there.»

« Be assured, sir,» answered I, « that I shall ever feel proud and honored by the princesses' notice; and I will take care that the faithful account of all their gracious condescension shall be faithfully and loudly reported.»

The bishop departed much pleased with the success of his negotiation; and, above all, with the agreeable turn the affair had taken.

When I next saw the king, I said to him, « Your daughters, sire, are as amiable as you would have them; they have been informed that some evil disposed persons have asserted, that they had prohibited my being of the party to Chantilly; and in order to testify how differently they were disposed towards me, they despatched the bishop de Senlis."

"A most fit person to be intrusted with such a commission," replied the king; "for I have, in every instance, endeavored to justify the wishes of this holy pillar of the church, this worthy prelate with his double-faced politeness, towards those whom he openly compliments, and reviles in private, just as his interest may require it. Well! and what did you say to him?"

"That I most humbly thanked the princesses, but that the state of my health did not permit of my visiting Chantilly for the present."

"That is all very well," answered Louis XV.; "you have framed your excuse with much generosity, which I greatly fear will meet with a very different turn; for if you do not accompany me to Chantilly, the report circulated will be, that the princesses have forbidden you their presence; which my dearly beloved daughters, whose characters I fully understand, will neither affirm nor deny before the public, whilst in private they will vow that they prohibited you from following them. Always excepting madame Louise, who is an angel upon earth, as she will most assuredly be one day in heaven, where I trust her prayers for me and mine will be heard."

I did not at the time pay any particular attention to the latter part of the king's discourse, for, indeed, the beginning was far more interesting to me; but when I afterwards learnt that madame Louise had quitted the grandeurs of Versailles for the gloom and austerity of a convent, I recollected it, and easily comprehended that it was spoken in allusion to an event which took place some time afterwards, and of which I shall speak in its proper place. However, the king's prediction was exactly verified; and the report in general circulation was, that the princesses had declared their intention of not going to Chantilly; it was further rumored, that I was there, but in a private and concealed manner. This is wholly untrue; the king would never have permitted such a humiliation; nor do I believe I should have submitted to it had he even desired it. However all this may be, he sought to recompense me for his absence by writing a most delightful letter, which I will subjoin for your gratification. To me it was of so much the greater value, that having its royal writer's permission to show it, it became the first death-blow I aimed at the cabal against me. The king possessed a much greater portion of wit and talent than the weakness and timidity of his character permitted to appear.

CHAPTER XX.

Unpublished letter of Louis XV.—Madame du Barry's cousin, M. de Maupeou—The comtesse du Barry saves the life of a young girl seduced by the arts of the curé of her village—She obtains pardon of the comte and comtesse de Louerne—The king presents her with Lucienne—A second meeting with the youthful prophet—His further predictions—He is sought for—His mysterious letter to the countess.

"How does my sweet friend contrive to bear our tedious separation? is she happy and amused? In that case I can only say, she has greatly the advantage over him who now addresses her. No, my lovely countess, I am dragging on a tedious and uninteresting existence, spite of the great and earnest endeavors of my good cousin and host to provide for my enjoying the gaiety by which I am surrounded; but, alas! amidst the many faces with which his mansion is thronged, that one which is dearest to me is wanting, and all becomes a blank in my eyes; and I yawn with irrepressible weariness in the midst of the glittering pageants given to honor my arrival; and you may rest assured that I shall hail with delight the termination of a visit, which seems already to have swelled the period of our separation into ages. I will not attempt to conceal from you, that those who have good cause to envy your supreme dominion over my heart, have set every scheme in action to lead me even into a temporary oblivion of you, but their attempts are as vain as their impotent rivalry, and need cause no uneasiness to you, my beloved friend. I frequently smile at the vast pains and precautions of which my '*sacred person*' is the object; and I am *continually* encountering '*by chance*' some of those fair ladies who would fain usurp your place, sometimes bedecked with jewels rare, and sometimes, as Racine says,

"'—— *dans le simple appareil*
D'une beauté, qu'on vient d'arracher au sommeil.'

"Madame de Grammont, for instance, takes an infinity of trouble respecting my choice of your successor, which she is resolved shall be either herself or one of her choosing. I protest to you that I find all these plots and counterplots very amusing; and can only say, that my daughters, who are completely duped by those practising them, must be more completely deceived than I had imagined possible. Nor can I quite deny that I feel a half mischievous delight in reducing to despair,

« ‹ ——*ce peuple de rivales*
Qui toutes, disputant, d'un si grand intérêt,
Des yeux d'Assuérus attendent leur arrêt.›

«*Assuérus* (which, of course, means me) keeps one perpetual reply to all their high-sounding praises and eulogiums of such or such a lady. ‹ She is well enough, certainly; but the comtesse du Barry excels her a hundredfold ›: then follow such shrugs, such contortions of countenance, and such vain efforts to repress the rage of disappointed vanity and ambition, that I am nearly ready to die with laughter.

« Apropos of dying; I inquired the number of deaths which took place at Chantilly last week; only four, they say! Now I think that number quite sufficient for the size of the place. I walked as far as the village cemetery, which is large and judiciously placed. I must tell you, that one of my footmen has gone to that last journey from which none return: he was a tall, presuming sort of fellow, remarkable for nothing but his impertinence, and the continual scrapes he was forever getting into amongst the soubrettes. However, he met with his death in some sudden brawl. My people sought to conceal this piece of intelligence from me; but having once heard of it, I despatched Flamarens to ascertain in what corner of the cemetery he has been interred.

« The duc de Tresmes talks much of you, and boasts greatly to the honor of your friendship; he has dubbed himself your ‹ *sapajou* ›; this is not amiss for a peer of France, and what is still more gratifying, he has assumed a title which, I believe, no one in the kingdom will attempt to dispute his incontestable claim to call his own. Villeroi is all impatience to return to Versailles. The dukes of Richelieu and d'Aiguillon, both uncle and nephew, recommend themselves to your kind recollection. Thus you see you may reckon upon a few devoted and attached friends, even without him, whose hand is busily tracing these lines, and he, I can promise you, is inferior to none in the truest love and affection for you.

« The ladies of whom I would have you be most on your guard are mesdames de C., de B., de P., de G. They really throw themselves in my way till I can call them nothing but fools for their pains; but I must do them the justice to say that they are less ambitious than you, and so that they could rob you of your place would care very little whether I could offer them my heart with the other honors to which they aspire; in fact, 'tis time we were together again, for the people here seem determined to profit by my stay amongst them. My cousin entertains us magnificently, and pleasure succeeds pleasure in a continual round of enchantment: he tells me he has others still more charming in store against the time when you will honor him with your presence. Am I right in promising that this will be ere very long? Adieu, what a long letter have I written you. I will now conclude by bestowing an imaginary kiss on that lovely face, which must satisfy me till I have the felicity of seeing you again.

« And now, my dear friend and fairest countess, I will end my lengthened epistle by praying God to have you ever in His holy care and keeping.»

The receipt of this letter afforded me the liveliest pleasure, and I wrote to the king regularly every night and morning. I might here introduce a specimen of my own epistolary style, but I will not; for altho' the whimsical and extravagant things my pen gave utterance to were exactly to the king's taste, they might surprise you; but my royal correspondent loved the wild and bizarre turn of my expressions, and I fulfilled his wishes; perhaps it was not the only instance in which I gratified his inclination.

My cousin, the chancellor of France, had remained to keep me company instead of joining the party at Chantilly. *My cousin*, say you, and by what right or title could M. de Maupeou become such? I will tell you. First of all he only aspired to the honor of relationship, but afterwards, turning over the archives of his family, he found the most incontestable proofs of his belonging to the ancient families of the du Barry; and full of joy, he hurried to me, unrolling at my feet his genealogical tree, to the great amusement of comte Jean and my sisters-in-law, who, after a long examination, declared that he was justly entitled to the appellation of first cousin; from that period he always addressed me *cousin*, which I flattered him by returning whenever I was in the humor.

About this period I was the happy instrument in saving from death a young girl whose judges (as will be seen) were about to sentence her to be hanged without fully understanding whether she were innocent or guilty. This unfortunate creature was a young and pretty country girl, whose worthy pastor, the curé de Liancourt, had availed himself of the influence he possessed, and of the advantages of his authority over the poor creature's mind, to seduce her from the paths of virtue. Unfortunately, just at the time when she expected to produce a living witness of their amour, and when she trusted to the cares of the curé to procure for her those comforts her unfortunate situation required, the author of her shame was suddenly carried off by a violent death, and the wretched girl, either thro' ignorance or the shame of having listened to the illicit passion of a priest, neglected to make any of those formal declarations required by the law, and gave birth to a dead infant. The justice of the village, informed of her fault, caused her to be arrested, and recorded against her sentence of death, a decision which was afterwards approved by parliament.

The poor girl was in this extremity when, happily for her, M. de Mandeville, a worthy man from either Normandy or Picardy, who had served in the black musketeers, resolved upon attempting the revocation of the severe sentence which had been passed upon her, by addressing the king thro' my mediation; he accordingly followed me to Marly, where I then was, and lost no time in forwarding to me the following billet:—

«Madame,—Beauty has ever been found the inseparable companion of goodness; to yours I would appeal to obtain the favor of an immediate audience. My reasons for requesting it are not to solicit either place or pension, but to save the life of an erring creature whose crime has been that of ignorance. I await your reply with the most lively impatience, and have the honor to remain, etc., etc.»

This note puzzled me excessively, however I gave orders for the immediate introduction of M. de Mandeville, whose appearance was even more prepossessing than his note; he looked and spoke like an honorable man, endowed with that sensibility so precious and so rare; he put into my hands the petition, whilst he explained to me the particulars relative to it, and I instantly wrote to the chancellor the following note, of which a thousand copies were taken in the course of the day. Altho' it has been many times in print, I shall offer no apologies for again submitting it to your perusal.

«Monsieur le chancellor,—I do not profess to understand your laws, but they seem to me as unjust as barbarous. They are contrary to both reason and humanity, if they put to death an unfortunate female for giving birth to a still-born child without having previously disclosed her situation to any one; and yet, according to the memorial annexed to this, the petitioner is so circumstanced. Here is an unhappy girl about to pay with the forfeit of her life for her ignorance of such a law, or because the modesty and even shame attendant upon her disgraced condition prevented her conforming to it. I appeal to your sense of justice; the wretched girl, concerning whom I write, is a fit object for the exercise of your lenity, and I venture to assure myself that you will at least effect the commutation of her punishment. Your own kind feelings will dictate all I would ask further for her.

«I am, etc., etc.»

I felt very certain that, from the manner in which I had expressed myself, the consent of M. de Maupeou was quite certain; I therefore said to my visitor, the handsome musketeer,

«And now, sir, the noble work of charity, in which you have associated me must be completed: go yourself and see the chancellor, tell him you come from me, and do not quit him till you obtain the reply I have solicited.»

M. de Mandeville loaded me with thanks and praises which I did not really merit, because in the present instance I acted as much from the wish to gratify my own feelings as his. My name and my letter were talismans before which all doors flew open, and he reached, without difficulty, the presence of the chief administrator of justice, who, having read the memorial and the note I had affixed to it, said, «That is sufficient, sir; have the goodness to assure madame la comtesse du Barry, my cousin, that the reprieve she desires is already granted; and as my fair relation appears to fear trusting implicitly to my personal friendship and humanity, I will set her mind at rest by putting you in possession of the legal forms requisite for the prisoner.»

He immediately issued the necessary orders for suspending the execution of the sentence, which M. de Mandeville lost no time in communicating to the poor girl, who, a very few days afterwards, received a full pardon, and was thus, in a manner, snatched from an unmerited and ignominious death. The musketeer requested permission to present my *protégée* to my notice. She really was a very pretty girl, her feelings overpowered her, and she fainted in her attempt to throw herself at my feet; I soon revived her by the aid of those restoratives which my staring people stupidly did not try to offer, and then to send her away perfectly happy and cheerful, I slipped into the pocket of her apron a *rouleau* of fifty louis which the king had given me for her use. And here I must remark, that this prince, avaricious as he naturally was, was yet always ready to perform a good action, and, indeed, in this respect, he possessed many excellent qualities to which no one has ever yet done justice.

When I next saw the chancellor — « Do you know, my fair cousin,» said he, « that if I wished to set you and the parliament quarreling together I need only just whisper in what manner you treat our laws ? »

« Your laws,» exclaimed I, « are barbarous edicts, made rather for tigers than for men. Your punishments are atrocious, nor do I see their application to correct a single malefactor; particularly in the case of this young girl it is abominable, and if the king would listen to me such savage edicts should not long remain unrepealed.»

« That may do very well,» replied M. de Maupeou, « some time hence, but not just now; ere our penal code can be revised we must have magistrates more supple than those who now dispute our slightest innovation; and if, by the grace of God, we can manage to make a clear house of them, why we may confidently anticipate the noblest results.»

By these and similar insinuations the chancellor bespoke that aid and assistance which I afterwards so largely rendered him when he commenced the ruin of parliaments.

Upon another occasion my credit and influence were employed with equal success. The objects of my present exertions were the comte and comtesse de Louerne. Both husband and wife were deeply loaded with debts, a thing common enough with the nobility of the time; these debts they never paid, another thing by no means unusual; their creditors, whose flinty hearts were but little moved by the considerations of their rank and high blood, sent officers to enforce payment, when the Louernes opposed them with positive force and violence, and the laws, thus outraged, condemned them to suffer death. In vain did persons of the highest rank in the kingdom intercede in their behalf, imploring of the chancellor to interpose with the king; altho' deaf to every other entreaty he instantly granted a reprieve at my solicitation, declaring I was the only person who could have effected so much in behalf of the distressed culprits, as well as being the only source thro' which the king's mercy could be obtained.

Immediately upon this notification, I was waited upon by the comtesse de Moyau, their daughter, and the baronne d'Heldorf, their daughter-in-law; both these ladies came to me in the deepest sorrow, and I mingled my sighs and tears with those they so plentifully shed; but this was rendering poor service, and if I desired to aid their cause it was requisite I should speak to the king, who was little disposed to show any indulgence in such cases, and was never known to pass over any attempts on the part of the nobility to resist the laws; he looked with horror on every prospect of the return of those times which he hoped and believed were passed and gone never to return. I well knew his sentiments on the subject, and yet, trusting to my great influence over his mind, I did not despair of success; besides Chon, my sister-in-law, was constantly reminding me that people of a certain rank should support one another, and that now was the time or never. I therefore resolved upon befriending the daughters of comte de Louerne to the utmost of my power, and for that purpose I placed them both in a corner of the drawing-room so as to catch the king's eye as he entered; he observed them, and inquired who those two ladies were. « Sire, » replied I, « they are the heart-broken daughters of the comte and comtesse de Louerne, who implore the clemency of your majesty to save the lives of the authors of their being. »

« Ah! » returned he, « madame, you know I can do nothing against the law which they have offended. »

At these cruel words the two young ladies threw themselves at his feet, exclaiming, « Pardon, pardon, sire; in the name of heaven and your illustrious ancestors. »

« Rise, ladies, » said the king; « I would willingly serve you, but I have not the power. »

« No, sire, » cried I, « you must not, you cannot refuse our united prayers; and I here vow to remain kneeling at your feet till your lips shall pronounce the word which shall restore life and happiness to so many afflicted hearts. »

« Madame, » said the king, altho' in a tone less firm, « you force me to do what my principles condemn; but since it must be so, I yield; and only rejoice that the first personal favor you request of me is to perform an act of beneficence. Ladies, » added he, turning towards the comtesse de Moyau and her sister-in-law, « you owe the lives of your parents to the generous mediation of the comtesse du Barry. »

The joy of the Louernes was only equalled by the base calumny of my enemies, who accused me of having prepared this scene, which was got up by the king and myself to produce effect and excite popularity. Could such disgusting falsehoods have entered the minds of any but the most depraved? Yet those who continually watched and misrepresented my least action appeared anxious to deprive me of even the taste for, as well as the power of, doing good. This took place at Choisy, which we very shortly after quitted for Compiègne, where I passed my time very agreeably. The king would not suffer either the duchesse de Grammont or the comtesses d'Egmont and de Brienne to accompany us upon this excursion. It has likewise been asserted, that neither the duchesse de Grammont nor the princesse de Beauvau was present during the king's first visit to Chantilly: that is not correct; it was at the second that they were forbidden by Louis to join the party. Those who fabricated such accounts, in all probability derived their information from either the stable or the kitchen, which was all they knew of the court of Louis XV.

During my abode at Compiègne I dined several times at the house of my brother-in-law, Cleon du Barry, then a captain in the regiment de Beauce, who was, with a detachment, quartered in the neighborhood of the castle; and he, with the rest of his brother officers, vied in endeavors to please and amuse me. They gave fêtes in my honor, were perpetually devising fresh schemes to render the place agreeable to me; and in that they perfectly succeeded, for I quitted Compiègne with no other regret than that my stay there was at an end.

The king appeared each day more and more solicitous to render me happy, and even anticipated any wishes I might form. Amongst other marks of his favor, he bestowed upon me the splendid pavilion de Lucienne, sold by the duc de Penthièvre after the death of his son, the prince de Lamballe. You know this charming spot, which both nature and art have so liberally contributed to adorn: I have converted it into the most perfect and delightful habitation in which a mortal could desire to end her days. Nevertheless, this hope of passing my life tranquilly and happily within its sheltering bosom will prove but fallacious, if I may credit a prediction which has been verified already in part. You doubtlessly remember the young man who so obstinately pursued me to announce the high destiny to which I should attain, ere I had for one moment contemplated such an elevation. Well! you will scarcely credit me when I declare, that all recollection of him had entirely escaped me; but, in truth, the constant vortex of a court life leaves no time for the recollection of the past, and fills our minds with no other ideas but to provide for the present, and occasionally to glance at the future.

However, I thought no more of my young prophet, when one Sunday, after my return to Versailles from Compiègne, I attended mass at the castle; all at once I caught a glimpse of my mysterious acquaintance, leaning his back against the wall behind the altar. He was examining my countenance with a deep and fixed attention. You may picture to yourself my astonishment and surprise at recognising in this place the person who had so long ago foretold my brilliant destiny. The color rushed to my cheeks, and he could distinctly observe how much I was agitated by his presence, and his beautiful countenance was lit up with a pleasant smile; after which he gracefully waved his hand round his head as tho' he would say, «Are you not queen of France?» This gesture excited my astonishment still further; however, I returned his mute inquiry by a slight inclination of the head, intended to say, «You are right.» In a moment a sort of cloud seemed to cover my eyes. So soon as I could recover from the sudden dimness which obscured my vision, I endeavored to bend my looks in an opposite direction; for so greatly was I the point of general observation, that I feared to awaken suspicion by an indiscreet attention to one particular person or place: and when after some little time had elapsed, and I ventured to turn my eyes again to the spot where the young man had been standing, he had disappeared.

I was unable to recover my astonishment at the whole affair, and the suddenness of his departure inspired me with a lively desire to know more of him, whether he were man or demon. I mentioned it to Chon the same day, who, having listened to me with extreme attention, «Upon my word,» said she, «this is a most marvellous event in your history. Why do you not mention the fact to M. de Sartines?»

«Because it appears to me folly to disturb or annoy a person who has given me no offence; and were I to put him into the hands of the police, I might possibly find reason to repent having acted so. On the other hand, I would give any sum of money for one more interview with this wonderful person.»

There the conversation ended; but my sister-in-law, by an unpardonable curiosity she ought not to have indulged in, wrote, unknown to me, to the lieutenant of the police, entreating of him to use the most active measures to trace out the object of my curiosity. M. de Sartines delighted at having an opportunity of proving to me and mine his skill and zeal, turned all his bloodhounds loose upon the track of this unfortunate being. During these proceedings I received a letter, sealed with five black seals, bearing the impress of a death's head. I thought at first that it was to notify the decease of some friend, and I looked upon the style as gloomy as it was strange; but, upon opening it, I found it to contain the following words: —

> «Madame la comtesse,— I am perfectly aware that the strict pursuit made after me in your name is without your knowledge or sanction: those sent in search of me have spared no pains nor trouble to ascertain my name and abode. My abode! Let all as they value themselves avoid meeting me there; for, when they enter it, it will be never to quit it more. Who am I? That can only be known when this life has been exchanged for another. I charge you, madame, to command the lieutenant, M. de Sartines, to cease his researches after me; they would be fruitless, and might only compromise your safety. Remember, I predicted your good fortune; was I not correct in it? I have also foretold reverses; I am equally correct in them also. You will see me twice more; and should I unfortunately cross your path a third time, prepare to bid adieu to the light of heaven and the pleasures of this world.»

It is impossible to convey an idea of the excessive terror with which I was filled upon the perusal of this billet. I summoned my sister-in-law, and complained of the harshness of conduct thus adopted against my pleasure. Chon was equally alarmed, and confessed to me what she had done in asking the aid of M. de Sartines; at the same time that she was the first to declare that it was requisite to put an end to all further search, which, in one shape or other, might bring on the most fatal consequences. I therefore wrote myself to M. de Sartines, thanking him for his exertions; but saying, that my sister-in-law and myself had learned from the lips of the mysterious stranger all we were desirous of knowing, and that any future researches being unpleasant to him would be equally disagreeable to me. M. de Sartines obeyed my request; and from that period till the death of the king I heard no more of this singular personage.

CHAPTER XXI.

Extraordinary anecdote of Louis XIV. and madame de Maintenon — The comtesse du Barry at Chantilly — Opinion of the king and the comte de la Marche respecting the «Iron Mask» — Madame du Barry visits madame de Lagarde.

My acquaintance with the singular being I was speaking of in the last chapter did not end here, as you will find in the sequel. I will now give you an account of an equally strange affair, in nearly the same words as Louis XV. himself related it to me. Altho' strongly recommended by my sister-in-law and M. de Sartines to conceal the whole story of my mysterious friend from the king, yet, unaccustomed to the prudential observation of court reserve, I, one fine evening, in order to fill up a long blank in the conversation, related the story from beginning to end. His majesty listened with attention until I had concluded.

« This is indeed," said he, « a most singular history; and I think you have acted very wisely in putting an end to all such interference on the part of the police; for in such cases you frequently run great risks to procure a trifling gratification. We have seen something of the same sort in our family."

This discourse excited my curiosity; and I entreated of him to explain himself more fully. « I ought not to do so," replied he; « such transactions should be kept for ever concealed; but as more than half a century has elapsed since the event I allude to took place, I think I may venture to break the silence I have religiously observed until now. You are the only person I have ever mentioned it to, and I must bind you to the strictest secrecy."

This I faithfully promised; and so long as Louis XV. lived I kept my word.

"At the conclusion of the last century, during the month of September," resumed the king, "it happened that Louis XIV., and madame de Maintenon formed the wish of consulting together some learned astrologer, in order to ascertain whether the coming age would be productive of good or ill to them. As neither of them knew to whom to apply, in order to attain their object, madame de Maintenon was compelled to confide her wishes to her friend, madame de Montchevreuil, who readily engaged to find for her the person she required; for, spite of the severity with which the law visited such practices, there was no scarcity of dealers in augury, who promised good or bad fortune accordingly as they were paid for it.

"Whilst this lady was making diligent search after one perfectly competent to satisfy madame de Maintenon, this latter, in conjunction with the king, despite the superiority of their minds, was greatly disturbed at the probable consequences of the step they meditated. Their desire to penetrate into futurity appeared to them as ridiculous as it was criminal, but their weaker feelings triumphed; and the result of their deliberations was, that far from relinquishing their intention of searching the book of fate, they should lose neither pains nor trouble to attain their object; and to encourage each other, they reckoned upon their fingers the names of every person of their acquaintance, or even belonging to the court, who had derived profit and advantage from the predictions of fortune-tellers.

"The minds of all at this period were still imbued with those superstitious feelings, of which many of the most illustrious persons had given ample proof even in the preceding reign. We have become either more wicked or more sceptical, whichever you please to term it; but this is certain, that many of the things predicted were accomplished with an exact punctuality, which might serve to overthrow the finest arguments of the greatest philosophers, and which has indeed destroyed many ingenious theories. Doubtless the hidden laws of nature have reference to other beings than ourselves; and, beyond dispute, may be said to govern the creatures of an unknown world as well as exercising control over poor mortals like us." After this short digression, of which I give you the precise wording, the king continued as follows:

"On the following day madame de Montchevreuil paid a visit to madame de Maintenon, in which she declared, that upon mature reflection, she could not proceed with the commission she had undertaken: that it was tempting Providence, and had better be abandoned. This remonstrance had no effect upon madame de Maintenon, who shielded herself from any necessity of retracting, by repeating to herself, that she had pledged herself to join Louis XIV. in the undertaking, and it would never do for her to forfeit her character for firmness and good sense by now appearing trifling and capricious. However, she feigned a seeming compliance with the advice of madame de Montchevreuil, whilst, in reality, her mind was resolved upon executing her project.

"There was in her household a female who was not immediately one of her establishment, altho' generally ranking as such; one of those active, stirring persons, who thrust themselves into a noble family under the equivocal title of half servant, half lady. This one had charge of all the necessary purchases of linen, engaged the servants, kept watch over their conduct, procured for the marchioness whatever particulars she might require upon any subject; and took upon herself, in a word, any piece of service by which she could more firmly plant herself in the family of her employers. She received no fixed wages, but their absence was abundantly compensated in the numerous rich presents that were continually made her. Her sleeping apartment was always immediately adjoining that of madame de Maintenon in the castle. A person of this description (as may be readily supposed) knew the world too well to find any difficulty in procuring a mere fortune-teller; and as her discretion might be confidently relied on, it was resolved by her mistress to intrust her with the design.

"Two days after, she had removed all difficulties by discovering an Italian priest, famed as the most skilful necromancer of his day, one who undertook to reveal the decrees of fate to all those who should consult him, as clearly and readily as tho' its leaves lay open as a book before his eyes. But this gifted person lived in the utmost dread of attracting the notice of parliament, and exercised his art only under the strictest assurances of secrecy, in the most retired and secluded manner, with every precaution to prevent the possibility of a surprise.

"These conditions were too gratifying to madame de Maintenon to cause much delay in subscribing to them; and it was finally arranged, that the prophet and his new applicants should meet at a house in Sèvres belonging to the royal family, then in the occupation of madame Cerfol (the lady of whom mention has been already made). The marchioness was to repair thither at one o'clock in the morning with a single friend. To have taken such a measure in open daylight would have been to proclaim their secret to all Paris. One person besides madame de Cerfol was necessarily admitted into their confidence, and that was the duc de Noailles, who was charged, by the king's express orders, to take every possible precaution to ensure their safety, as far as it could be done without attracting public attention to so extraordinary an affair.

"At the hour appointed madame de Maintenon and the duc de Noailles ascended a carriage which awaited them at one of the park gates, and soon conveyed them to Sèvres, whither the Italian priest had gone the preceding night. This wretched man had celebrated alone the sacrifice of the mass, and had consecrated several wafers.

"Everything confirmed the opinion, that the conjuror, up to the present moment, merely supposed himself sent for to satisfy the curiosity of some country nobleman and his lady, who were both anxious and eager to read their future fortune thro' his assistance. I can only suppose, if he had been in ignorance of the real rank of those who addressed him, the sight of the king must have quickly undeceived him, as the conclusion of the story proves he well knew to whom he spoke when he delivered his prediction. However this may have been, he was no sooner alone with the marchioness, than he commenced the necessary preparations for the performance of his sorceries and enchantments; he burned perfumes, offered prayers, and with loud invocations adjured the powers of hell to answer him; and in the midst of a wild and agitating sound which pervaded the whole building, during the heavy swell of noises too dreadful to have arisen from mortal sources, and whilst a thousand visions were flitting to and fro, he drew the horoscope of the king and madame de Maïntenon. He promised Louis XIV. that he should succeed in all his undertakings; and that, on the very day on which he spoke the words (the 2nd of October) one of his children had been called to the inheritance of an immense fortune. Then giving him a small packet, wrapped in new parchment, 'The day in which you form the fatal resolution of acquainting yourself with the contents of this packet,' said he, 'will be the last of your prosperity; but if you desire to carry your good fortune to the highest pitch, be careful upon every great festival, that is to say, Easter, Whit-Sunday, the Assumption, and Christmas, to plunge a pin in this talisman, so that the point shall pass directly thro' it; observe to do this, and you will live perfectly happy.'

"The king accepted this fatal present, and swore upon the Gospel never to open the packet; he richly rewarded the priest, who from that period lived in a retreat so well concealed as to evade the most diligent researches of those who sought to discover it.

"Some time after news was received, that on the very 2nd of October, 1700, named by the priest, Charles II., king of Spain, had appointed in his will Philip of France, son of the dauphin, his successor and heir, an inheritance truly immense, as the astrologer had foretold. You may well think how highly this realization of the prediction inspired the king with confidence as to the fulfilment of the remainder: and, on his part, he never failed upon any saint's day or other solemn festival to stick the mysterious pin in the talisman upon which so much depended.

"Nevertheless, spite of all these observances, his undertakings did not invariably succeed, which astonished him greatly; when one day the great Bossuet, happening to be at madame de Maintenon's, the conversation turned upon magic and sorcery, necromancy and their horrible profanations; and he expressed himself with so much force and energy, that the king and madame de Maintenon looked at each other without knowing what to say, and began, for the first time, to feel compunction for what they had done, and to regret their imprudence. They talked of it much together, and at length resolved to reveal their crime to their confessors. The punishment imposed on the king by his spiritual adviser was, that he should evince his contempt for the talismanic properties of the parchment packet, by immediately opening it.

« Louis XIV. did not by any means admire this method of expiating his fault; and a sort of involuntary dread took possession of him, as, in obedience to the command of his confessor, he went to procure the magic parcel, which he tore open in the presence of madame de Maintenon and father la Chaise. The packet contained nothing but a consecrated wafer, pierced thro' with as many pins as there had been saints' days since the king had received it. At the sight of this horrible sacrilege my grandfather was filled with deep remorse and consternation, from which it was a long time ere he recovered; and it was not until he had undergone many severe penances, fastings, and caused numberless masses to be said, that he felt himself at all relieved from the weight of his crime.

« But all this was only the commencement of the divine vengeance: and those in the secret of this unfortunate affair remarked, that this great monarch lost from that time as many male descendants in a direct line as he had stuck pins into the holy wafer.»

Louis XV. here terminated his singular history, which struck my mind with a sort of religious terror. I strove by every possible effort to dissimulate, concealing from the king the emotions to which his narration had given rise. I contented myself with observing, « that after hearing his marvelous recital, I should only be more confirmed in my determination to leave my young prophet to the tranquillity he desired.»

"It will be far best so," added Louis; "I know so many fatal results which have followed any indiscreet curiosity, that I am persuaded you had much better leave such mysterious affairs to work their own solution."

I promised to follow his advice, and we then conversed upon other subjects. Since then this anecdote has recurred to my memory; and without wishing to impeach the sincerity of Louis XV., I have asked myself, whether, by the opportune relation of this adventure, probably invented by himself, he did not seek to destroy the confidence I appeared to entertain in the predictions of my prophet. I say invented, because the king had a peculiar readiness and facility in composing these sort of wonderful tales, carefully noting down every circumstance which fell under his knowledge deviating from the ordinary course of things. He had a large collection of these legends, which he delighted in narrating; and this he did with an ease and grace of manner I have never seen equalled.

About this period the prince de Condé, whose gallantry never failed, entreated the king to pay a second visit to Chantilly: and it was upon this occasion that Louis erased from the list of court ladies all those whose presence would be disagreeable to me during our stay at Chantilly. One scene of pleasure followed another, and one fête succeeded another. I accompanied his majesty without ever quitting him; and if hitherto there had existed any doubts as to the sincerity of the king's attachment, the most sceptical person would now have been convinced of the fact. Louis XV. was never from my side, and appeared solely occupied in gratifying my slightest wish; the princes of the court carefully followed his example; and such a life as I then led was abundant compensation for all the pains and anxieties I had endured from the malice and jealousy of certain females, as well as the sarcastic bitterness of men, who feared lest my influence should destroy theirs.

I may, with truth, affirm that I received the honors and attention of a queen; verses, plays, all written to convey some praise or compliment to me; and the king

"PERMIT ME, MADAME LA COMTESSE," SAID THE PAPAL NUNZIO

By courtesy of Mr. David Belasco and Mrs. Leslie Carter. This scene is from David Belasco's play, *Du Barry*, played at Belasco's Theatre, New York, with Mrs. Leslie Carter as La Du Barry.

testified the lively gratification it afforded him to see me thus an object of general solicitude, as well as of the most flattering distinction. His conduct towards the prince de Condé became more gracious than it had ever been observed to be to the princes of the blood; for there existed a singular coolness in the royal family towards all the princes of this branch. The king looked upon it as vastly inferior to his own, because it had been separated from the throne before the accession of Henry IV. to the crown; he even asserted, that there was much to be said upon this subject, and prudence compels me to pass over the many histories and circumstances related by him to me of this brilliant portion of his noble race.

Neither the prince de Condé, whom I knew well, nor the prince de la Marche, entertained much regard for their relations; and they had always some spiteful story in store respecting the posterity of Louis XIII. There is one historical fact which has never been properly cleared up.

One day I was conversing with the comte de la Marche upon the disputes concerning the parliaments, and expressing my fear, that, if driven to desperate measures, the people would rise in open rebellion in favor of the magistracy. "They would be still more clamorous," replied he, "if they knew all I could tell them."

"And what do you know more than myself?" asked I; "your highness alarms me by speaking thus."

"Amongst events now passed and gone is one that would materially affect the public peace, if known."

"You must explain yourself, my lord," said I. He refused; but I persisted in pressing the matter with so much earnestness, that at last he said, in a low voice,

"Did you ever hear of the man who wore the iron mask?"

"Yes, certainly," replied I, "who was he?"

"A great prince, and a most unfortunate man."

"But who was he really?"

"In the eyes of the law the crown of France should have been his; but in the conscientious view of things he certainly had no claim."

The comte de la Marche stopped here; and, as I was not very deeply read in history, I did not exactly comprehend the distinction he had just made. I had frequently heard talk of the « Iron Mask,» whom people reported to be either allied to, or sprung from, the royal family; but all these particulars were confused in my memory. However, I was much struck with the conversation I had had with the comte de la Marche; and when next the conversation fell on this mysterious personage, I asked the duc de Richelieu what he thought of him.

« Upon my honor,» replied he, « I never could find out who he really was; not that I did not try,» added he, assuming an air of modest vanity, which well became his green old age. « I had a mistress of tolerably high birth, mademoiselle d'Orleans, as indeed I had the honor of having the princesses, her august sisters. However, the former, known under the name of mademoiselle de Charollais, was dying to do some act of kindness that should be agreeable to me. Well, I requested she would obtain from the regent, her father, the solution of the secret relative to the ‹ Iron Mask.› She used every possible device, but nothing could she obtain from her father, who protested that the mystery should never escape his lips; and he kept his word, he never did divulge it. I even imagine that the king himself is ignorant of it, unless indeed the cardinal de Fleury informed him of it.» The maréchal told me afterwards that he thought the opinion adopted by Voltaire the most probable, viz: that this unknown person was the son of the queen Anne of Austria, mother of Louis XIV. These last words helped, in a measure, to resolve the enigma which comte de la Marche had left me to unravel; and, with a view to satisfy myself more positively on the subject, I availed myself of the first time I was alone with the king, to lead the conversation to this story.

At the mention of the « Iron Mask,» Louis XV. started. « And do you really credit such a fable ? » asked he.

« Is it then entirely untrue ? » inquired I.

« Certainly not,» he replied; « all that has been said on the matter is destitute of even common sense.»

« Well, » cried I, « what your majesty says only confirms what I heard from the maréchal de Richelieu. »

« And what has he been telling you ? »

« Very little, sire; he told me only, that the secret of who the 'Iron Mask' really was had not been communicated to you. »

« The maréchal is a simpleton if he tells you so. I know the whole affair, and was well acquainted with the unhappy business. »

« Ah ! » exclaimed I, clapping my hands in triumph, « just now you affected perfect ignorance; you knew nothing at all about it, and now — »

« You are a very dangerous woman, » cried the king, interrupting me by loud fits of laughter, « and you are cunning enough even to surprise the secrets of the state. »

« 'Tis you, rather, who could not resist the inclination to let me see that you knew what the maréchal had declared you ignorant of. Which of us two is the more to blame, I wonder ? »

« Myself, I think, » answered the king; « for after all, you did but act with the candor and curiosity of your sex: it was for me to have employed more of the prudence of a king in my replies to your interrogatories. »

« Well, but, » said I, « since you really do know all about this man with the iron mask, you will tell it to me, will you not ? »

« I should be very careful how I gratified your curiosity, » said he; « this is a point of history which must never be cleared up; state reasons require that it should for ever remain a matter of doubt. »

« And *I* must have you tell me, » returned I; « do pray tell, and I will love you with all my heart. »

« It cannot be. »

« And why not ? This unfortunate person has been long dead without leaving any posterity. »

« Are you quite sure of that ? » inquired the king, in a serious tone.

« But what signifies, » said I, « whether he be dead or alive ? I entreat of you to bestow upon me this proof of your confidence. Who of all those who have spoken of him have told the truth?"

"Nobody; but Voltaire has approached it more nearly than any one else."

After this partial confession the king implored of me to change the conversation, which I could easily perceive was extremely disagreeable to him. Nevertheless, it seemed to me quite clear, that this celebrated person belonged to the royal family, but by what title I could not devise. It was in vain that I afterwards revived the subject; not even during the most tender confidences could I obtain the information I desired. Possibly had I lived with him some years more I might have succeeded in drawing from him all he knew respecting the object of my curiosity. Old men, like children, can conceal nothing from those they love, and who have obtained over them an influence they willingly submit to.

Before I proceed to more important events, I would fain speak of persons with whom I lived before my elevation. My godfather, M. Billard du Monceau, was still living, as well as madame Lagarde, with whom I had resided as companion. My interview with the former is well known; and the authors of "Anecdotes of My Life," published thirteen years since, have strictly adhered to the truth, with the exception of some vulgarisms they have put into the mouth of that excellent man which he never uttered.

As to madame Lagarde, she was strangely surprised to see me arrive at her house; and the evident embarrassment my presence occasioned her was a sufficient revenge on my part for the many unkind things she had said and done respecting me. I would not prolong her uncomfortable situation, but studied to conduct myself with the same unaffected simplicity of former days. I talked over the past, inquired after her family, and offered my best services and protection without malice for what was gone by, and with perfect sincerity for the future. But spite of all my endeavors to spare her feelings, it was evident that rage and humiliation at the advantage my altered fortunes gave me over her, struggled within her, and the conflict of her mind was but too plainly depicted in her countenance. However, that was the least of my troubles; I soon restored her to comparative calmness; and before I quitted her, made her promise she would come and see me.

She would gladly have evaded this request; but her son, the master of requests, who sufficiently misjudged me to fear my resentment, and who possessed great influence over her, induced her to present herself at my house. She accordingly came to call upon me, with a mind bursting with spite and jealousy; yet she choked down her angry passions, and so far humbled herself, as to entreat my pardon for her own sake and that of her family, for all her unkindness towards me. I would not allow her to finish; "Madame," said I, "I only allow agreeable recollections to find a place in my memory; had I entertained the slightest resentment against either you or yours, you may be quite certain I should not have again entered your dwelling; and I again repeat the offer I made the other day, of gladly seizing the first opportunity of being useful to you."

Each of these words expressive of the kindest feelings towards her was like the stab of a poniard. She, however, extolled them with the most exaggerated praise, imploring me to believe how deeply she regretted her past behavior, and talked so long and so much about it, that when she quitted me, it was with the most certain impression on my mind, that in her I possessed a most violent and implacable enemy, and in this conclusion I was quite correct. M. Dudelay, her son, had the effrontery to request to be presented to me, and charged the excellent M. de Laborde to make known his wishes to me. I begged he would inform M. Dudelay, that I admitted into the circle of my acquaintance only such as were known to the king; and that if he thought proper to apply to his majesty, I should obey his royal will on the subject, whatever it might be. He justly considered this repulse as a biting raillery, for which he never forgave me. I entertained no ill will against him for his past perfidy, but I considered it strange that he should presume to approach me with familiarity. I should not have adopted the same line of conduct towards the farmer-general, his brother, who, less assuming, contented himself with assuring me of his devotion, and the sincere regret with which he contemplated the past, without ever seeking to introduce himself into my presence.

CHAPTER XXII.

The chevalier de la Morlière — Portrait of the duc de Choiseul — The duc de Choiseul and the comtesse du Barry — No reconciliation effected — Madame du Barry and the duc d'Aiguillon — Madame du Barry and Louis XV.

About this period I received a piece of attention, any thing but gratifying if considered in a strictly honourable sense. The contemptible chevalier de la Morlière, who detested me, and subsequently pursued me with rage, presumed to dedicate to me some wretched collection of his compositions, and I had the weakness to accept the dedication; I had even the still greater folly to receive its author at my house; this piece of condescension injured me greatly. Until that period I had not, like madame de Pompadour, shown myself the protectress and patroness of men of letters; and even my warmest friends could not deny, that in stepping forwards as the encourager of literature, I had made a very unfortunate choice in selecting the chevalier de la Morlière as the first object of my patronage. But how could I have done otherwise? The prince de Soubise, who found this man serviceable upon many occasions, would have sacrificed any thing to promote his advancement; and I have been assured, that had the maréchal taken half the pains on the day previous to the battle of Rasbach, we should not have left it so disgracefully.

The king well knew the unfortunate chevalier for a man as destitute of modesty as merit; when therefore he saw his book upon the mantel-piece of my drawing-room, he said,

"So! you are the inspiring muse of the chevalier de la Morlière; I only warn you, when the day comes for him to be hanged, not to ask me to pardon him."

"Be assured," replied I, "that I will never deprive the Place de Grêve of one so formed to do honour to it."

In fact, the chevalier was within an ace of reaching it before his friends anticipated; for, very shortly after this conversation, he was guilty of the most detestable piece of knavery I ever heard of. He learned that an unfortunate young man from the country, into whose confidence he had wormed himself, was to receive 15,000 livres on his father's account; he invited him to supper, and, by the aid of two villains like himself, stripped him of his last sous. Not satisfied with this, he wrote the father such an exaggerated account of his son's loss and general bad habits, that the enraged and irritated parent procured an order to confine his son at Saint Lazare! Did you ever hear of a more infamous and accomplished rogue than my honourable *protégé?* However, I shall give him up to his fate, be it good or bad, and proceed with the relation of my affair with duc de Choiseul.

I had named to madame de l'Hôpital the hour at which I could receive the duke. She had requested, in pursuance of her directions, no doubt, that the conversation between us should take place either amidst the groves of Versailles or in the labyrinth of Marly; — the self-love of M. de Choiseul inducing him to desire that this interview should be so contrived, as to wear the air of a mere chance rencontre. To this I would not consent; saying, that it did not suit my pleasure to quit the house; and that when a gentleman solicited the favour of speaking to a lady, it became his business to wait upon her, without expecting she should come in search of him; and, spite of all the arguments of madame de l'Hôpital, I persisted in my determination: she had no alternative but to submit, and I awaited the coming of M. de Choiseul on the following day.

The duc de Choiseul possessed a greater reputation than his talents were entitled to; and his advancement was more attributable to his good fortune than his merit. He had found warm and powerful assistants in both philosophers and women; he was a confirmed egotist, yet passed for a man who cared little for self. He was quick at matters of business, and he obtained the character of a deep and profound politician. It must, however, be admitted, that he was witty, gallant, and gifted with manners so elegant and fascinating, that they never failed to remove the first unfavourable impression caused by his excessive plainness. The tide of public favour was with him; and, in order to contest it, it required all the influence of a woman, and that woman to be no less than the beloved mistress of the king of France.

He presented himself before me tastefully and magnificently dressed, both look and voice wearing the stamp of high-born pride and haughtiness. Nevertheless, amidst all this pomp, it was evident that he did not entirely feel the ease he assumed, and that a species of remorse rankled at his heart, spite of the courtier-like gallantry with which he had invested himself.

« Madam, » said he, bowing twice most profoundly, « the moment has arrived which I have long most ardently desired. »

« The fault has not been mine, my lord, » said I, « that it has been delayed until now. My door has never been shut against any visit you might have honoured me with. »

« Ah, madam! why have I not known this sooner? Some evil planet ruled my thoughts when it occurred to me that I might not be so happy as to meet with a favourable reception. »

« There, my lord, you were indeed in error; for though I might not feel a very tender friendship towards you whilst supposing I had many causes for complaint, I could not refuse you those marks of respect your rank and station entitle you to receive. »

« Then, madam, I may flatter myself that I should have been kindly received? »

« Yes, sir, you would ever have been welcome, but not those belonging to you, for I will be perfectly candid; always excepting the duchesse de Choiseul, for whom I entertain the greatest veneration and respect. »

« She is indeed well worthy the exalted opinion you express of her; and had I followed her advice, I should not have been found amongst the ranks of your enemies. »

"You confess the fact then, monsieur le duc?" said I.

"I trust, madam, you will not take advantage of an inadvertent expression to turn it against myself. What I fear is, that without ever having been your enemy, I may have passed for such in your estimation; and such indeed is the cruel position in which I am placed."

"Stay, my lord duke," cried I; "be candid, and acknowledge that you are my enemy as you have ever been; and that it is only because there has been war between us that you are now come to conclude a treaty of peace — "

"Peace or war, madam," replied he, "as you please to will it; all I will admit is, that things have turned out most unfavourably for my wishes. Your arrival at Versailles, your grace, beauty, and wit, excited universal jealousy; and, amidst the general panic caused by your all-excelling merit, was it not necessary I too should keep myself on my guard? For the first time in my life a beautiful woman became an object of alarm to me; you may further believe me, when I protest that, at the outset, I warmly defended you; but how could I wage war against so many — how oppose the general torrent? It bore me down."

"And you fear lest it should carry you beyond your depth, and would fain return to *terra firma;* is it not so, my lord duke?"

At this ironical speech an expression of heavy displeasure rose to the countenance of M. de Choiseul, and he remained for several minutes like a man who fears to trust himself to reply. Then he added,

"Madam, when I solicited the favour of this conversation, it was with the sincerest desire of adjusting all differences between us, and it would but ill advance that purpose were I now to reply to you with warmth and petulance; condescend, on your part, to lay aside sarcasm and raillery. You have already too many advantages over me, and it would ill accord with your wonted generosity to insult a half-conquered foe."

"You are right, my lord," answered I; "jests and recrimination will effect nothing; let us rather proceed at once to consider what is best for the interest of both."

« Willingly, » replied he. « Now you speak to the purpose; and as I was prepared to hear you — are you inclined for a serious discussion of our business? »

« Pray begin, my lord, I am all attention. »

« Well, madam, I deeply regret all that has passed, and deplore that my friends and part of my family should be disagreeable to you; I take upon myself to engage that their hostility shall end, and am willing to afford you the most perfect satisfaction upon this point. Impressed with highest respect for his majesty, and the most lively desire to serve him, I ask for nothing more than to be on good terms with those he loves; and as for the future, my unshrinking loyalty may be relied on. »

« I am well assured of it, my lord duke; and likewise that you have never taken any part in the calumnies which have been aimed at me. Let us then forgive the past; and since we are agreed as to the future, let us speak but of the present. I have friends fitted to serve the king, whose ambition leads them to aspire to that honour. What will you do to assist them? »

« Ere I promise that, madam, it is necessary I should be acquainted with them. »

« What would it avail to name them to you? You perfectly well comprehend to whom I allude. I am resolutely decided to support them, and to employ for this purpose the friendship with which his majesty deigns to honour me. »

The duke coloured deeply at these words.

« Then, madam, » said he, « you would fain strip me to enrich others? »

« No, my lord, I ask but a division of your possessions. You cannot have every thing; and it would not be fair that our reconciliation should be profitable to you only. »

« I did not anticipate, madam, in coming hither, that you would command me to offer up myself as a sacrifice upon an altar raised by you to the interests of your friends. »

« Meaning to say, my lord duke, that you will keep every thing to yourself. I cannot compliment you upon your liberality, however I may for your candour. »

« Madam, I have never since my entry into the ministry sought to live at the expense of my country, and let me resign office when I may, I shall retire loaded only with debts, whilst you and your friends draw large revenues from the nation.»

The conversation became warm and angry; the duke and myself, with crimson cheeks and inflamed countenances, surveyed each other with haughty defiance. At length he added,

« I had hoped that I should have quitted you more kindly disposed towards me.»

« And I, my lord, fancied that you were coming with an ardent desire for peace; but no, the spirit of your sister leads you astray, and you would fain punish me for her absence from court.»

« Madam, I beseech you to leave my sister in peace; she has gone, that ought to satisfy you. We will not, if you please, speak of her.»

« I only wish that she would likewise do me the honour to be silent respecting me. I am not ignorant that she continues to aim her slanders at me from afar as she did when near me. One might suppose that the sole object of her journeyings was but to excite all France against me.»

« Madam, you are mistaken. My sister—»

« Continues to play the same part in the country she did in Paris. She detests me because I happen to have youth and beauty on my side. May her hatred last forever.»

« Ah, madam, say not so; for with your charms you are indeed too formidable an antagonist; and the more so, as I clearly perceive you are not inclined for peace.»

« At least,» said I, « the war on my side shall be fair and open, and those belonging to you have not always waged it with me upon those terms.»

The duke merely warded off this last assertion by some unmeaning compliment, and we separated greater enemies than ever.

The first person to whom I could communicate what had passed was the duc d'Aiguillon. He listened to my recital without any decided expression of his opinion; but no sooner had I concluded, than he took me by the hand, and pressing it with a friendly grasp,

« How I congratulate you,» said he, « upon the good fortune which has extricated you from this affair. Do you know that a reconciliation with the duc de Choiseul would have involved your inevitable disgrace? What evil genius counselled you to act in such a manner?»

« I fancied I was doing right,» said I, « in thus proving to the king that I was not an unreasonable woman.»

« The Choiseuls,» replied he, « would have entangled you in their nets, and, separated from your real friends, would have made you the innocent author of your own destruction Tell the king just so much, that the duc de Choiseul has been to see you, that you conversed together some time, and that he has offended you more than ever.»

« I promise you, my kind friend,» said I, « to follow your advice.»

When I next saw the king, I apprized him of the visit.

« That does not astonish me,» said Louis XV., « the duke is anxious to be on friendly terms with you.»

« He has then taken a very contrary road to arrive at my friendship,» said I; « if he really desires that we should be on good terms, he must conduct himself very differently»; and there the conversation ended. But several days afterwards, having sent away my *mâitre d'hôtel*, with whom I had reason to be dissatisfied, and the king appearing surprised at seeing a fresh countenance amongst my household, I said to him, « Sir, I have got rid of *my* Choiseul, when will it please you to get rid of yours?» The king, without replying to me, began to laugh; in which, for want of a better termination to my remark, I was constrained to join.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Dorine — Mademoiselle Choin and the maréchal d'Uxelles — Zamor — M. de Maupeou's wig — Henriette — The duc de Villeroi and Sophie — Letter from the comtesse du Barry to the duc de Villeroi — His reply — The countess writes again — Madame du Barry and Sophie — Louis XV. and the comtesse du Barry.

Among the number which composed my household were three beings who played conspicuous parts in my family, and who received the kindest caresses in honour of their mistress. These three favoured objects were Dorine, Zamor, and Henriette. Following the order or disorder in which I have written thus far, I will first introduce my dear Dorine to your notice.

Sweet, beautiful Dorine! how amiably affectionate and attached to thy mistress wert thou! The poor animal still exists; for I would have you know that I am speaking of a most faithful little dog; now indeed grown old, asthmatic and snappish; but fifteen years since, distinguished for her lightness, swiftness, and grace, for her pretty little countenance, white teeth, large sparkling eyes, long tufted tail, and above all, for her snow-white coat, spotted here and there with the most beautiful brown.

Dorine was just three months old when madame de Montmorency brought her to me in her muff; her throat was adorned with a rich gold collar, bearing the arms of the du Barrys, and clasped with a large sapphire surrounded with diamonds. The moment she saw me Dorine leaped upon my lap with the most endearing familiarity, and from that period has never quitted me. My train of courtiers hastened to become those of the new favourite likewise; and pastrycooks and confectioners racked their brains to procure tempting morsels for the gentle Dorine. She sipped her coffee daily from a golden saucer, and

Zamor (between whom and Dorine a mutual dislike existed) was appointed her cupbearer. The wonderful instinct of the highly gifted animal soon taught her, that although she had free permission to bark at all the rest of the world, there was one person in it to whom it behoved her to show herself in her most gracious and smiling moods; who this person was I leave it to your sagacity to divine. She, however, indemnified herself for this extra complaisance by barking and biting at all who approached; and the handsomest, best turned leg in the court was not secure from the sharp teeth of mademoiselle Dorine. Nevertheless, all vied in praising and fondling her, and I was enchanted with the general admiration she excited, as well as the attention she received. One day that I was exultingly relating to the duc d'Aiguillon the cares and praises lavished on my dog, he replied, "The grand dauphin, son of Louis XIV., after the death of his wife, Marie Christine of Bavaria, secretly espoused mademoiselle Choin. The maréchal d'Uxelles, who was not ignorant of this marriage, professed himself the most devoted friend of the lady; he visited her regularly morning and evening, and even carried his desire to please her so far, as to send a servant with a dish of grilled hare for the house dog, who had a particular fancy for game dressed in that manner! These attentions and assiduities were faithfully continued for several years, till the grand dauphin died, and then no more morning and evening visits, no more presents to either mistress or dog. Apply the story well," added the duke, as he terminated his recital. Unfortunately the application of the tale presented itself but too soon, and I have experienced the sad truth of the history of mademoiselle Choin. At the death of the king so did my visitors disappear; and poor Dorine has partaken of the disgrace of the comtesse du Barry.

The second object of my regard was Zamor, a young African boy, full of intelligence and mischief; simple and independent in his nature, yet wild as his country. Zamor fancied himself the equal of all he met, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the king himself as his superior. This son of Africa was presented to me by the duc de

Richelieu, clad in the picturesque costume of his native land; his head ornamented with feathers of every colour, a short petticoat of plaited grass around his waist, while the richest bracelets adorned his wrists, and chains of gold, pearls, and rubies, glittered over his neck and hung from his ears. Never would any one have suspected the old maréchal, whose parsimony was almost proverbial, of making such a magnificent present.

In honour of the tragedy of Alzire, I christened my little negro Zamor, to whom by degrees I became attached with all the tenderness of a mother. You ask me why? Indeed that is more than I can tell; perhaps at first I looked upon him as a sort of puppet or plaything, but, imperceptibly to myself, I became passionately fond of my little page, nor was the young urchin slow in perceiving the ascendancy he had gained over me, and, in the end, to abuse his influence, and attained, as I have before said, an almost incredible degree of insolence and effrontery. Still I pardoned all his folly, and amused myself from morning to night with watching his nimble fingers perform a thousand tricks of jugglery. Even now that I have lost the gaiety of my happy days, when I recall his irresistibly comic ways, I catch myself laughing, like an old simpleton, at the bare recollection of his monkey feats. I could relate twenty of his mischievous pranks, each more amusing than the other. I will, however, excuse you from hearing nineteen of them, upon condition that you shall listen to the twentieth, which I select as being the shortest.

One day, upon which I had invited some select friends to dinner, a superb pie was brought to table as a present which the ungallant M. de Maupeou had had the politeness to send me in the morning. One of the company proceeded to cut it, when scarcely had he pierced the crust, than its perfidious contents proved to be an immense swarm of cockchafers, which spread humming and buzzing all over the chamber. Zamor, who had never before seen these insects, began to pursue them all over the room, buzzing and humming as loudly as they did. The chase lasted a long time; but at last the poor cockchafers, weary of carrying on the war, and mistaking the peruke of M. de Maupeou for an impregnable fortress, flew to take refuge there. What did Zamor do, but run to the chancellor, snatch off his wig, and carry it in triumph to a corner of the room with its colony of cockchafers, leaving us all to admire the bald head of the chief magistrate. I could willingly have enjoyed a hearty laugh at this scene, but, out of respect for M. de Maupeou, I feigned to be much displeased with Zamor, whom I desired one of the attendants to flog for his rudeness. However, the guests and the chancellor uniting in entreaties that I would pardon him, I was obliged to allow my assumed anger to give way to their request, and the culprit received a pardon.

There was but one person in the world whom Zamor really feared; he was however on good terms with all my friends, and did not disdain the society of the king. You have heard that the latter, by way of amusement, bestowed on my little negro the title of governor of the Pavillon de Lucienne, with a revenue arising therefrom of a thousand crowns, and that the chancellor caused the necessary papers to be prepared and delivered to him sealed with the state seal.

But of all the persons who visited me, the one most beloved by Zamor was madame de Mirepoix, who never came without bringing him amusing presents or some sweetmeats. The sight of her threw him into ecstasies of delight; and the moment he caught sight of her, he would clap his hands, leap with joy, dance around her, and kiss her hand, exclaiming, "*Ah! mame la chale!*" ("Ah! madame la maréchale"). The poor maréchale always dreaded meeting the king when she came to visit me and Zamor; for the great delight of his majesty was to make my little negro repeat a name of Israelitish origin, which he did in so ridiculous a manner, that the modesty of my fair friend was most shockingly put to the blush.

One person alone never vouchsafed to bestow the slightest glance of encouragement upon my little imp of Africa, and this was comte Jean, who even went so far as to awe him into silence either by a frown or a gesture of impatience; his most lively tricks could not win a smile from the count, who was either thoughtful or preoccupied with some ambitious scheme of fortune. Zamor soon felt a species of instinctive dread of this overpowering and awe-inspiring genius, whose sudden appearance would chill him in his wildest fits of mirthful mischief, and send him cowering to a corner of the room; where he would remain huddled together, and apparently stupefied and motionless, till the count quitted the apartment.

At the moment of my writing this, Zamor still resides under my roof. During the years he has passed with me he has gained in height, but in none of the intellectual qualities does he seem to have made any progress; age has only stripped him of the charms of infancy without supplying others in their place; nor can I venture to affirm, that his gratitude and devotion to me are such as I have reason to expect they should be;* for I can with truth affirm, that I have never ceased to lavish kindness on him, and to be, in every sense of the word, a good mistress to him.

There was one member of my establishment, however, whom I preferred to either Dorine or Zamor and this was Henriette, who was sincerely attached to me, and who, for that very reason, was generally disliked throughout the castle. I had procured a good husband for her, on whom I bestowed a post which, by keeping both himself and his wife in the close vicinity of the castle, prevented my kind friend from quitting me. However, my poor Henriette was not fated to enjoy a long connubial felicity, for her husband, being seized with a violent fever, in a fit of delirium threw himself from a window into the court below, and was taken up dead. Slander availed herself even of this fatal catastrophe to whisper abroad, that the death of the unhappy man arose from his deep sense of his wife's misconduct and infidelity. This I can positively assert was not the case, for Henriette was warmly and truly attached to him, and conducted herself as a wife with the most undeviating propriety. The fact was, that Henriette had drawn upon herself a general hatred and ill will, because she steadily refused all gossiping invitations, where my character would have been pulled to pieces, and the affairs of my household discussed and commented upon: there, indeed, she had sinned beyond all hope of pardon.

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* This wretch, whom the comtesse du Barry loaded with her favours and benefits, conducted her to the scaffold.— EDITOR.

She it was who pointed out to me the perfidious conduct of the duc de Villeroi. This gentleman, from the very beginning of my rise in the royal favour, had demonstrated the most lively friendship for me, of which he sought to persuade me by the strongest protestations, which, weak and credulous as I was, I implicitly believed, until one day that Henriette, availing herself of my being quite alone, let me into the secrets of my establishment and furnished me with a key to the assiduities of M. de Villeroi.

Amongst the females in my service was one named Sophie, young, beautiful both in face and form, of a sweet disposition, and every way calculated to inspire the tender passion. M. de Villeroi felt the full force of her charms, and became the whining, sighing lover — her very shadow. Up to this period I had had no cause of complaint against M. de Villeroi; and certainly I should not have interfered with his plebeian flame had he not thought proper, when questioned by my enemies as to his continual presence at the castle, and great assiduities there, to protest that his visits thither were not in honour of my charms, but for those of my waiting-maid. However, my vanity had rendered me his constant dupe.

I felt perfectly astonished as I listened to Henriette's recital; and when she had ceased, I conjured her to tell me candidly, whether she had not invented the whole tale either out of spite to Sophie or with a design to make me break off further friendship with the duke. This she most solemnly denied, and recommended me to make inquiries amongst my friends, who would be compelled to bear testimony to the truth of all she had asserted. I determined to do so; and the first person whom I was enabled to interrogate respecting the affair was the bishop de Senlis. This prelate came frequently to see me, and I found his society each day more pleasing. He served me as a kind of gazette of all that passed with the princesses, in whose opinion I had still the misfortune not to be in the very highest estimation. When occasion required it, M. de Roquelaure would venture to take my part, and that without making a single enemy; for who could be offended with one so affable, so good, so full of kindness towards all? In fact, the worthy bishop was so fortunate as to obtain the love of every person who knew him; and, in the most select society of opposing parties, each would reserve a place for good M. de Roquelaure.

When I questioned him as to his knowledge of the affair, his embarrassment was evident.

"What a world is this!" cried he. "Why, let me ask, do you listen to those who repeat such mortifying tales to you?"

"Because, my lord, my friends will not see me made the sport of a heartless and perfidious friend; and, if you entertain the slightest regard for me, I conjure you to tell me all you know upon the subject."

"And do you, my good madam, conceive that it would become my sacred calling to speak ill of my neighbour? besides, surely you would not attach any belief to the idle reports spread about the castle by ill-disposed persons?"

"All this has nothing to do with my question, my lord," resumed I. "I ask you once again, whether you ever heard the duc de Villeroi assign his passion for one of my women as the reason for his visits to me? Have you, my lord bishop? I entreat you to answer."

"Madam, I have not," said the good prelate, colouring deeply.

"Ah, monsieur de Roquelaure," cried I, "you must not say mass to-morrow, for I greatly fear you have just committed a certain fault which is styled fibbing."

The bishop made no reply, and his silence spoke volumes of confirmation.

Scarcely had he quitted me than the duc d'Aiguillon entered, to whom I put the same question; and he frankly confessed, that the excuse alleged to have been used by the duc de Villeroi was strictly the expression of that gentleman.

«I was wrong,» said the duke, «not to have mentioned it to you, but I was silent from a desire to preserve peace between you. Now that the affair has been revealed to you, I will not sully my lips with a falsehood for the pleasure of upholding an unprincipled man.»

«I will not ask you to tell me more,» replied I. «I know enough to make me despise the cowardly spirit of him whom I reject as unworthy of my friendship.» So saying, I ran to my writing-table, and wrote to the duc de Villeroi the following note:—

> «MONSIEUR LE DUC,—I love my friends with all their faults, but I cannot pardon their perfidy; and, since from what I have heard I am left to conclude, that but for the charms of my attendant Sophie, I should not have been favoured with so many of your visits, I now write to warn you, that I this day dismiss the unfortunate object of your admiration from my service, and therefore recommend you to cease all further communication. Your presence in my house would be any thing but agreeable to me; and since the fair object which has hitherto attracted you will no longer dwell under my roof, I presume your presenting yourself before me would only be more painful than you have hitherto found it. The frankness of my conduct may offend you, but it cannot surprise or grieve you more than your duplicity has me.
>
> «I remain with befitting sentiments, monsieur le duc,
> «Your most humble and obedient servant.»

When I had completed my letter, I rang, and a footman attended. «Go,» said I to him, «carry this note immediately to the duc de Villeroi, and wait, if it be necessary, the whole day, until you can return with the assurance that you have delivered it into his own hand.»

Whilst I was thus speaking to the man, who had been engaged by my steward, and very recently entered into my service, I chanced to look at him inadvertently, when my attention was arrested by seeing him rapidly change colour. I could not at the moment conceive what could thus agitate him, and making a sign for him to depart immediately upon his commission, he slowly left the room, regarding me as he went in such a manner, that I could not fail recognising him: and here, my friend, I must lay aside every particle of self-love and vanity ere I can make you a complete confession; the retrospect of my life brings many events, of which the remembrance is indeed painful to me, and only the solemn promise I am under to conceal nothing restrains me from consigning many particulars to oblivion. I am once more about to incur the chance of drawing down your contempt by my candour, but before I enter upon the subject, permit me to conclude my affair with the duc de Villeroi.

My letter was a thunderbolt to the duke. He better than any one knew the extent of my credit, which he dreaded, lest I might employ it to his injury; he therefore hastened to reply to me in the following words: —

« Madame la comtesse, — I am a most unhappy, or rather a vilely calumniated man; and my enemies have employed the most odious means of making me appear despicable in your eyes. I confess, that not daring to aspire to you, I stopped at the footstool of your throne, but I wholly deny the words which have been laid to my charge. I venture to expect from your justice that you will grant me the favour of an opportunity of exculpating myself from so black a charge. It would be cruel indeed to condemn a man without hearing him.

« I am with the most profound respect, &c.»

To this hypocritical epistle I replied by another note as follows: —

« Every bad and unfavourable case may be denied, monsieur le duc, therefore I am not astonished at your seeking to repel the charge of having uttered the disrespectful words laid to your charge. As for the explanations you offer me they would be fruitless; I will have none with those who have either been my friends or appeared to be such. I must therefore beg you will cease all attempts at a correspondence which can lead to no good results.

« I have the honour to remain, &c., &c.»

After this business was despatched, I caused Sophie to be sent for to attend me.

« Well, Sophie,» said I, « you perceive the confusion you have occasioned through your folly. Is it then true that the duc de Villeroi has spoken of love to you ? »

« Yes, indeed, madam,» replied the poor girl, weeping bitterly.

« And you return his passion ? »

"I believe so, madam."

This *naïf* confession made me smile. I continued—

"Then you are not quite sure of the fact?"

"No, madam; for when I do not see him I forget all about it; but when he is before me, so handsome and so generous, so full of love, I try to make myself equally fond of him; but somehow I cannot help preferring his courier, M. l'Eclair."

These last words completely destroyed all attempts at preserving my gravity, and I burst into the most uncontrollable laughter, which, however, soon gave place to a painful recollection of how soon this young and artless creature, as simple as she was beautiful, was likely to lose this open-heartedness in the hands of her seducer.

"Sophie," said I to her at last, "this unfortunate affair forbids my retaining you any longer in my service; I am compelled to send you from me. I trust this noble lover of yours will never forsake you; have a care only to conceal from him, should you persist in encouraging his addresses, that he has a rival in the person of his courier, l'Eclair."

Sophie threw herself weeping at my feet. I raised and encouraged her by the kindest words to pursue the right path, but I remained steady in my determination of sending her from me.

I was not mistaken. The duc de Villeroi became the possessor of poor Sophie, and publicly boasted of having her under his protection. He did not, however, proceed to these extreme measures until he had essayed every possible means of effecting a reconciliation with me, and he employed more than a hundred persons in the vain attempt of inducing me to pardon him. With this view the maréchale de Mirepoix, whose succour he had implored, observed to me that it was sometimes necessary to feign to overlook an insult; I replied, that dissimulation was an art I knew nothing of, nor did I wish ever to acquire it.

"Really, my dear countess," cried she, "you should not live at court, you are absolutely unfit for it."

« It may be so,» replied I; « but I would rather quit Versailles altogether than be surrounded by false and perfidious friends.»

All the remonstrances of the good-natured maréchale were fruitless, I could not bring myself to pardon a man who had so openly outraged my friendship.

Directly I saw the king, I related the whole affair to him.

« It must be confessed,» said he, « that the duke has behaved very ill towards you, but he has certainly shown his taste as far as regards Sophie. She is a sweet creature.»

« Ah! you are all alike,» cried I. « You gentlemen think a pretty face an excuse for every fault; and he only deserves blame who can attach himself where beauty is wanting.»

« Because he is a simpleton for so doing,» said Louis XV. with the utmost gravity, giving me at the same time an affectionate embrace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The prince des Deux Ponts — Prince Max — The dauphin and Marie Antoinette — The comtesse du Barry and Bridget Rupert — The countess and Geneviève Mathon — Noël — Fresh amours — Nocturnal adventure — Conclusion of this intrigue.

All my friends were not treacherous as the duc de Villeroi; and I may gratefully assert I have possessed many true and sincere ones who have ever faithfully adhered to my fortunes. One in particular I shall mention here, that I may recommend him to your warmest esteem; for, although of high and distinguished rank, he did not despise the good opinion of the meanest citizen. I speak of the prince des Deux Ponts, Charles Auguste Christian. This prince, who chanced to visit France during the zenith of my court favour, was very desirous of seeing me, and both he and his brother were presented to me by the comte de la Marche, their friend, and they quickly requested the honour of my friendship. Auguste Christian pleased me most by his gentle and amiable manners, although most persons gave the preference to his brother, Maximilian Joseph, better known by the name of prince Max. Auguste Christian, in the fervour of his attachment, speaking openly to me of the delicacy of the situation, proposed to me, in case of any reverse, that I should seek an asylum in his dominions; and I must do him the justice to say, that at the death of the king, far from forgetting his proffer, he lost no time in reminding me of it. Fidelity and attachment such as his, is sufficiently rare to merit a place in my journal. The prince des Deux Ponts was presumptive heir to an immense inheritance, that of the electorate of Bavaria, and the electorate Palatine, to the latter of which he was direct heir after the decease of his cousin, the present elector. I could almost wish that he had already succeeded to these possessions: he can never reign too soon for the happiness of his subjects.

Prince Max had served in France; he was extremely well looked upon at court both by the king and the princesses. As for the dauphiness, prejudiced against him as she was by her mother, she naturally regarded him with an eye of cool mistrust, and manifested her open dislike by never inviting him to any of her parties. Prince Max spoke of this pointed neglect to the king, who immediately summoned the dauphin. « My son, » said he to him, « I see with regret that prince Max is never an invited guest at any of your balls and fêtes. Remember, he belongs to a family which has been our most ancient ally, and do not take up the quarrels of a house which, until your marriage, has ever been disposed in deadly hatred to us. »

If the dauphin was not gifted with a very extensive capacity, he was possessed of sufficient plain sense to comprehend, and to enter into the views of his grandfather, to whom he pledged his word, that henceforward prince Max should be treated with more respect; and he kept his word, for the instant he returned to his apartments, he commanded the duc de la Vauguyon to add the name of prince Max to the list of invited persons. When the paper was drawn out it was carried to the dauphiness, who was with her husband. She read on till she came to the name of prince Max, which she desired might be erased; but the dauphin interfered. « Oblige me, » cried he, « by suffering this name to remain; his ancestors have for ages been the friends of our family, and his alliance may one day be useful to us in Germany. »

The dauphiness comprehended the signification of these words, and her fine eyes were filled with tears. However, she no longer insisted upon the erasure, when her husband, who most tenderly loved her, further declared it to be the king's desire that nothing should be done which could in any way displease the prince des Deux Ponts. He was, therefore, from that period invited to the house of Marie Antoinette, who indemnified herself for this compulsory civility, by refusing to bestow upon him one single smile or gracious word. It must indeed be agreed that the dauphiness had brought with her into France too many Austrian notions, which she was long in losing for those of a wife and mother; but now at the moment of my writing this, she is much changed, and is as true a French woman as though she had been born and bred in Paris. Unfortunately, the people appear slow in giving her credit for her altered opinions, and to this mistake will she owe the loss of that general love and popularity to which she has such just claims.

Prince Auguste Christian entertained for me a sincere regard, which I returned with the truest friendship. My feelings were as pure and simple as his own, spite of the odious calumnies with which my enemies have attacked this harmless acquaintance; but their slander in this matter was no worse than the manner in which they spoke of every person who visited me. According to their report, I was the mistress of all who presented themselves. 'Tis well for you, ye courtly dames, that you may convert friends into lovers with impunity; be the number ever so large none dares arraign your conduct; but for those of more humble pretensions it is indeed considered atrocious to number more than two admirers; should we ask to swell the list to a third — what comments, what scandal, what vilifying reports are in circulation!

In this letter, my friend, I shall speak to you exclusively of myself. You will find little in my conduct to praise, and I fear, much to blame. You will easily perceive my heart was better than my head; and dear as your opinion is to me, I write on in the hope, that should my candid avowal lose me any portion of your esteem, it will yet obtain me a larger share of your friendship.

The dismissal of Sophie from my service occasioned a vacancy in my household. Immediately her departure was known, I received numberless solicitations from all who heard of it. Three days afterwards, Henriette came to inform me that the wife of an attorney of Châtelet solicited the task of serving me in Sophie's stead; that she was a well-looking and respectable person, and might very probably suit me.

« Will you see her, madam? » continued Henriette. « She is recommended by the marchioness de Montmorency. »

« Willingly, » answered I; « desire her to come in. » Henriette left me and quickly returned, introducing the new candidate.

At the first glimpse I recognised Brigitta Rupert, that haughty girl, who had been my early friend and companion at Saint Aure, but who found it impossible to continue her friendship and favour to a humble milliner's girl. The sight of her occasioned me a surprise by no means of a pleasing nature; and the involuntary start I gave, evidently recalled me to her recollection. In a moment her cheeks assumed the paleness of death, and her self-love seemed to suffer the most horrible torments at the light in which our rencontre mutually placed us. As soon as she could command herself sufficiently to speak, she cried,

« Ah! madam, do I then appear in your presence? »

« Yes, » replied I, « before the poor and humble milliner to whom you so harshly refused your friendship! »

« Fortune has well avenged you, madam, » said Brigitta, in a melancholy tone; « and as I can easily imagine how unpleasant the sight of me must be, I will hasten to relieve you from it. »

These last words touched me, and restored me in a degree to my natural good temper.

« Brigitta, » said I to her, « after the little affection you have ever manifested for me, it would be impossible as well as unwise to take you into my service; but let me know in what way I can best promote the interest of yourself and husband, and I pledge myself to accomplish it for you. »

« I thank you, madam, » answered she, resuming her accustomed haughtiness, « I came to solicit a situation near the person of the comtesse du Barry. Since that is refused me, I have nothing more to request. »

« Be it as you please,» replied I. Brigitta made a low courtesy, and quitted the room.

Henriette, who had been the witness of this scene, expressed her apprehensions that I should be displeased with her for introducing an unwelcome visitor to me.

« No,» cried I, « 'tis not with you I am vexed, but myself.»

« And why so, dear madam ? »

« Because I reproach myself with having in my own prosperity forgotten one of my earliest and dearest friends, who loved me with the tenderest affection. Possibly she may now be in trouble or difficulties, from which I might have a thousand ways of relieving her; but it is never too late to do good. To-morrow, early, you shall set out for Paris; when there, go to the rue Saint Martin, inquire for the sign of la Bonne Foi; it is kept by a pastrycook, named M. Mathon, of whom I wish you to learn every particular relative to his daughter Geneviève.»

My wishes were laws to Henriette, who instantly retired to prepare for her journey. I had not ventured to desire her to glean any information concerning the brother of Geneviève, and yet at the recollection of the handsome Nicolas my heart beat impetuously. With what impatience did I await the return of Henriette! at length she came.

« Well! » said I.

« I have found out M. Mathon,» answered Henriette.

« Which, the father ? »

« Yes, madam.»

« And what is his present occupation ?»

« As usual, madam, superintending his kitchen and shop.»

« Is he alone in his business ? »

« Oh, no! madam; he is assisted by his son, a fine dark handsome young man.»

« His son then lives with him ? »

« Yes, madam, and he is married.»

« Married! — but it is not of this young man I wish to speak, but of his sister, of Geneviève; tell me of her.»

« I only learned, madam, that she had married a tailor, named Guérard; who, after having been very unsuccessful in business, died suddenly, leaving her wholly destitute with two young children.»

I immediately wrote the following note to my early friend:—

«The comtesse du Barry having heard of the misfortunes of madame Guérard, and knowing how much she is deserving of a better fate, is desirous of being useful to her. She therefore requests madame Guérard will call next Monday, at two o'clock, on her at her hotel, rue de la Pussienne.»

Poor Geneviève nearly fainted when she received this note, which was conveyed to her by a footman wearing my livery. She could not imagine to whom she was indebted for procuring her such exalted patronage, and she and her family spent the intervening hours before her appointed interview in a thousand conjectures on the subject. On Monday, punctually at two o'clock, she was at the hotel dressed in her best, her lovely countenance setting off the humble style of even her holiday garb. She knew me the instant she saw me; and, in the frank simplicity of her own heart imagining she could judge of mine, she ran to me, and threw herself into my arms, exclaiming,

«Oh, my dear Jeannette, what pleasure does it afford me to meet you again. Oh! I see how it is; you are the friend of the comtesse du Barry, and it is to you I shall owe my future good fortune, as I do this present mark of her favor.»

«No, my good Geneviève,» cried I, weeping for joy, «she who now embraces you is the comtesse du Barry.»

After we had a little recovered ourselves, I took my friend by the hand, and led her to a sofa, where we seated ourselves side by side. Returning to the scenes of our early youth, I related to Geneviève all that had occurred since—my adventures, faults, and favour. When I had concluded my recital, Geneviève commenced hers, but it was soon told. There is little to relate in the life of a woman who has passed her days in the virtuous discharge of her duties.

Our mutual confidences being over, and having again exchanged a most affectionate embrace, I put into the hands of my companion a portfolio, containing 30,000 livres in bank bills. I promised her likewise to obtain for her some lucrative situation. « Do more than this for me! » cried Geneviève. « Since you will still grant me your friendship, secure for me the happiness of occasionally meeting you. I can with truth declare, that of all your proofs of kindness and regard, that which I prefer is the pleasure of seeing you. »

This ingenuous request touched my heart, and I replied to it by fondly caressing the warm-hearted Geneviève, and assuring her that my purse and my house should be ever open to her. We then resumed our interesting reminiscences, and Geneviève was the first to speak of her brother. At the name of Nicolas I felt the blood mount to my very forehead, and an indefinable sensation passed over me at the mention of him who had possessed my virgin love. I strove, however, to conceal from my friend the powerful emotion which agitated me, and I replied, with apparent tranquillity, that I should be happy to assist her brother with the best of my credit and influence; and I kept my word by obtaining for him, at the solicitation of his sister, some lucrative situation, the exact nature of which I do not now recollect, where they resided together in ease and comfort. I had only to recommend them to the notice of M. de Boulogne, who felt himself much flattered at being selected by me to make the fortunes of my two friends.

From this time Geneviève visited me as frequently as she could, and her society delighted me; whilst, in her conversation I found a frankness and sincerity which I had vainly sought for at court. She had loved me when a simple milliner, and she cherished the same fond regard for me in my improved situation. Her friendship has not forsaken me in my reverses; and I feel quite assured that death only will dissolve the tender friendship which still subsists between us. As for her brother, he spared me much shame and confusion by never seeking my presence; a meeting with him would indeed have overwhelmed me with painful recollections.

And now, my friend, I am about to relate to you an adventure, the bare mention of which covers my cheek with guilty blushes; fain would I conceal it from you, but my promise is given to lay my whole heart before you, and it shall be done, cost what it may.

I know not why it should ever have been permitted you gentlemen to frame laws, which, while they permit you, in the gratification of your passions, to descend ever so low in the scale of society without any disgrace attaching itself to you from the obscure condition of the object of your search, to us females it is prohibited, under penalty of incurring the utmost degradation, to gratify the inclination of our hearts when awakened by one of more humble rank than our own. A great lord may love a kitchen maid, a noble duke, like M. de Villeroi, may indulge his fancy for a waiting-woman, and yet lose no portion of his dignity, or of the esteem in which the world holds him; but, on the other hand, woe to the high-born dame who should receive the homage of an obscure citizen, or the noble countess who should lend a favourable ear to the sighs of her *valet de chambre;* the public voice would loud and angrily inveigh against so flagrant a breach of decorum. And why should this be? But, my friend, do you not see in my seeking to defend so weak a cause sufficient intimation that such a justification involves a consciousness of requiring it? Alas! I plead guilty, and will no longer delay the painful confession I have to make.

Do you remember a singularly handsome young man, who, during my abode with madame Lagarde, fascinated me till my very senses seemed bewildered by my passion. You know how he betrayed me, and how, through him, I was expelled the house, as well as the termination of this foolish adventure. You are now to pass over seven or eight years, and take your place with me in the drawing-room, in which I stood when I rang to summon a servant to convey a letter to the duc de Villeroi. You may remember what I told you in the last chapter of the person who entered, of his agitation and his blushes, and of his fixing his eyes with deep meaning upon me till he quitted the room — this servant was Noël!

Had I listened to the dictates of prudence, I should, without loss of time, have obtained against him a *lettre de cachet*, which would have freed me from all chance of discovery through his means; but I could not listen to such cool-blooded, though cautious, suggestions. One idea only took possession of my mind — the absurd desire to know what had become of Noël since we separated, and by what accident I now found him wearing my livery in the castle. With this intent I availed myself of the first moment I was secure from interruption, to summon him to my presence. He threw himself at my feet, imploring of me to pardon his audacity. « Alas, madam! » said he, « I am more unfortunate than guilty. I saw you walking some time since, and I could obtain no rest or peace till I was fortunate enough to obtain admission to your establishment. Punish me for my temerity if you will; expel me from the castle, have me confined in a prison, I deserve it all; but, voluntarily, I cannot leave this house; and if you will only permit my stay, I solemnly vow you shall see nothing in my conduct but the zeal of an attached and respectful servant. »

I was weak enough to pardon Noël and shortly after to raise him to the rank of *valet de chambre*, which brought him infinitely too much about me.

Yes, my friend, the woman is, after all attempts to excuse it, blamable for bestowing her affection on one below herself in the scale of society. Nature herself appears to have planted in our bosoms a kind of instinct, which warns us from it, and a prejudice against all those who so degrade themselves. It is different with men; they can confer rank and elevation on the beloved object. A woman should always have reason to look up to and feel proud of the man to whom she consigns her heart; this species of vanity is mixed with the noblest love, and the woman who can overlook it, acts from passion of the lowest, basest kind. How easy is it to reason! Alas! why have I not always acted as well as I speak.

I was thus again a second time enthralled by Noël, and much more so, too, than I will now tell you. My faithful Henriette, whose devoted attachment for me kept her ever watchful of my safety and reputation, was thunderstruck at perceiving what I vainly strove to conceal from her; and, as she has since told me, was long in deciding whether to speak to me of the affair, when an unexpected incident arose, which determined her, at every risk of my displeasure, to use her endeavors to put an end to so disgraceful a connexion, which must infallibly have ended in my disgrace.

One night, or rather midnight, all was at rest in the castle, and I was sleeping peacefully in the arms of Noël, when all at once I was awakened by the sudden opening of an outer door, which announced to me the approach of the king, who had merely one more door to open ere he would be in my apartment. Noël, terrified, leaped quickly out of bed, and ran to seek refuge in a small chamber adjoining where Henriette slept. Happily she was yet awake; and, by the light of a night-lamp or *veilleuse* recognized Noël, who, with clasped hands, conjured her to take pity upon him. Henriette saw the danger, and putting out her hand, seized him, and drawing him rapidly towards her, made him lie down beside her. Noël, struck with her goodness, was preparing to offer her the same marks of his gratitude he had shown me of his respect; but repulsing him, she said in a low voice, « Wretch, think not it is on your account I thus expose my reputation; 'tis to save that of my beloved mistress; either conduct yourself with silent respect or you are lost.» At this threat Noël's courage melted away and he lay still as a frightened child. « Listen,» said Henriette, « if you do not quit this place to-morrow at break of day, without seeking to see madame again, I will denounce you to the king, who will inflict upon you the most dreadful punishment.»

Whilst these things were passing in the chamber of Henriette, I did not feel perfectly at ease on my side, and many were the wise reflections I made upon my folly, as well as the promises I gave never again to expose myself to such imminent danger. Nor did my terrors abate till after the king had quitted me. At the sound of my bell Henriette hastened to my bed-side.

"My good Henriette," said I to her, trembling from head to foot, "what a night of anxiety have I passed, I must indeed confess —"

"Fear not, my beloved mistress," replied she; "I will watch over your safety, and trust to be enabled fully to provide for it."

I durst not then ask for any further explanation of her words, for such was the ascendancy her good and steady conduct had given her over me, that she would certainly have blamed me for my glaring imprudence. I pressed her hand in mute thankfulness; she comprehended my silence and left me to myself.

At the end of some days, seeing nothing of Noël, I ventured to question her as to his fate: she then related to me all you have been told, and added, that the day following this shameful and unfortunate night she had lost no time in apprizing the comte Jean of all that had occurred, who had quickly despatched Noël out of the kingdom, furnishing him with a purse of ten thousand livres to defray his travelling expenses. Such was the fortunate termination of this disgraceful affair; and now, having completed my painful confession, I will change the subject to others doubtless more calculated to interest you than the recital of such lapses.

CHAPTER XXV.

Madame du Barry succeeds in alienating Louis XV. from the duc de Choiseul — Letter from madame de Grammont — Louis XV. — The chancellor and the countess — Louis XV. and the abbé de la Ville — The maréchale de Mirepoix and madame du Barry.

MATTERS now assumed an air of importance. My struggle with the des Choiseuls had become a deadly war, which could only be terminated either by his downfall or my dismissal from court; this latter measure was not very probable; an old man is not easily detached from a woman whom he loves, and each day only added to my ascendancy over the mind of the king. It is true, that the same force of habit which enchained Louis XV. to me bound him likewise to M. de Choiseul. The idea of change terrified him; and so great was his dread of fresh faces, that he would have preferred dying with his old minister, to creating a younger one who might witness his end. Happily the duke himself brought on the crisis of his fate; his power was cramped on all sides, yet, resolved not to lay it down till the last extremity, he sought to stay his failing credit with the rising influence of the dauphiness. . His enemies were not slow in pointing out to the king his minister's frequent visits and great assiduities to a foreign princess, and enlarged upon the fatal effects this new alliance might produce to the monarchy.

Meanwhile the chancellor, threatened by the parliaments, saw only one way of averting the storm which was about to burst on his head. This was to introduce into the cabinet persons entirely devoted to himself; but to accomplish his purpose, it was necessary to exclude the duc de Choiseul and his party. M. de Maupeou came to me in December, and after having gently scolded me for what he termed my carelessness, he showed me a letter from the duchesse de Grammont, which, he said, would wonderfully aid our plans. This letter was written to one of the presidents of the parliament of Toulouse, M. de ———. I cannot give you his name; for, although I have preserved the original of the letter, I have mislaid the envelope on which the address was written. I here give you a copy of this curious and important production: —

« MONSIEUR LE PRESIDENT,— I promised to give you the exact details of all that passed in this gay metropolis, and 'tis with much pleasure I sit down to fulfill my engagement. Things go on much as usual, or, perhaps, I should be speaking more correctly, were I to say, they are rapidly progressing from bad to worse. We have no longer a king in France; all power is lodged in the hands of one sprung from the most infamous origin; who, in conjunction with others as intriguing as herself, seeks only to ruin the kingdom, and to degrade it in the eyes of other nations.

« The noble firmness of sovereign courts is odious to people of this class; thus you may imagine the detestation in which they regard the candid and loyal conduct of the duke. In the hopes of procuring the dismissal of my brother, they have chosen for his successor a wretch loaded with crimes, a coward, an extortioner, a murderer — the duc d'Aiguillon. As for you gentlemen, who now constitute our parliament, your places will soon be filled by a magistracy drawn from the dregs of society; a troop of slaves, deaf and blind, except as he who pays them best will have them exercise those powers.

« This is no time for indolent repose; we must at once courageously and unanimously defeat the guilty schemes of our enemies. So long as my brother retains his present post he will support you with his best interest; but, should he be dismissed, your business will soon be finished.

« I beg my best remembrances, first, to your excellent lady, and after her, to madame B. and madame L., not forgetting the marquise de Chalret, whose wit is truly Attic; nor the marquise de P—s, who conceals beneath the graceful exterior of a Languedocian the soul of one of Corneille's Roman matrons. For yourself rely upon my warmest friendship and endeavours to serve you. My brother is most anxious to know you, after the flattering manner in which I have mentioned you to him. When will you gratify us both by visiting Paris? Ever yours, »

Nothing could have arrived more *à propos* for our purpose than this letter. I was still engaged in its perusal when the king was announced; I wished to hurry it back into the hands of M. de Maupeou; but he, more crafty than I, requested I would keep it.

« It is fitting, » said he, « that it should be seen by the right person. »

Louis XV., astonished at the strange scene, inquired what it meant.

« A most shameful piece of scandal, sire, » replied I.

« An infamous epistle, » added the chancellor, « which one of my friends managed to abstract from the post-office, and forwarded to me: I brought it to madame la comtesse, that she might admire the determined malice of our enemies. »

« You excite my curiosity, » cried Louis XV. « Madame, have the kindness to allow me to see this paper. »

« Indeed, sire, » exclaimed I, « I know not whether I ought to obey your majesty, so entirely has the writer of the letter forgotten the respect due to your sacred person. »

« Oh, » said the king, « do not fear that; I am but too well used to the offence to feel astonishment at its occurrence. »

I placed the paper in the hand of Louis XV., whose eye easily recognised the handwriting of madame de Grammont. « Ah, ah! » cried he, « is it so? let us see what this restless lady has to say of us all. » I watched the countenance of the king as he read, and saw the frown that covered it grow darker and darker; nevertheless he continued to read on without comment till he had reached the end; then sitting down and looking full at the chancellor, he exclaimed,

« Well, M. de Maupeou, and what do you think of this business? »

« I am overwhelmed with consternation, sire, » replied he, « when I think that one of your majesty's ministers should be able to conspire thus openly against you. »

« Stay, » cried Louis hastily, « that fact is by no means proved. The duchesse de Grammont is a mad woman, who involves the safety of her brother; if I only believed him capable of such treachery, he should sleep this night in the Bastille, and to-morrow the necessary proceedings should be commenced against him: as for his sister, I will take care of her within four good walls, and avenge myself for her past misconduct, by putting it out of her power to injure me further."

"Sire," said I, in my turn, "remember she is a woman; I beseech you to pardon her, and let the weight of your just indignation fall upon her brother."

"Chancellor," cried the king, "this business must not be lightly passed over."

"Nor without due consideration," replied M. de Maupeou, "your majesty may look upon this letter as the basis of a secret plot: as for the duchess, I am of my cousin's opinion; despise her audacious attempts, but spare not her brother; he alone is the guilty as well as dangerous person."

The king made no answer, but rose, and crushing the letter in his hand, threw it from him.

"Would," exclaimed he at last, "that the fiends had those who take such delight in disgusting me with my very existence. Heavens! how justly may I say I despise all men; nor have I a much better opinion of your sex, madame la comtesse, I must warn you."

"Much obliged, sire," cried I; "really I was not prepared for such gallantry. It is rather hard that you should quarrel with me because this disagreeable duchess behaves ill! Upon my word it is very unpleasant!"

"Come, come," said Louis XV., kissing my cheek, "don't you be a naughty child; if I had not you, where should I turn for consolation amidst the torments by which I am surrounded? Shall I tell you? In the midst of all these perplexing affairs, there are moments in which I fear I may not be promoting the happiness of my people."

"Your majesty is greatly mistaken," replied the chancellor; "the nation in general must esteem themselves most happy under your reign; but it will always happen that ill-disposed persons seek to pervert the public opinion, and to lead men's minds astray. The duchess, when travelling, was the faithful and active agent of her brother.

The duke, to secure his stay in the ministry, will eagerly avail himself of every adventitious aid; within your kingdom he seeks the support of the parliaments and philosophers; without, he claims the succour of Germany and Spain. Your majesty is certainly master of your own will, and it would ill become me to point out the path you should tread; but my duty compels me to say, that the duc de Choiseul is the greatest enemy of the royal house: of this he gave me a convincing proof in the case of your august son; and now, if he fancied he should find it more advantageous to have the dauphin for his master —"

"Chancellor of France," cried Louis, much agitated, "do you know what you are asserting?"

"The truth, sire," I exclaimed. "The public voice accuses the duc de Choiseul of the death of your son; they declare —"

"How! you, too, madam!" exclaimed the king looking at me fixedly.

"And why not, sire? I am merely repeating what is in every one's mouth."

"I have heard this horrible charge before," added the king; "the Jesuits informed me of it, but I could not give credit to such a monstrosity."

"So much the worse," replied I; "in the world in which we live we should always be on our guard."

"Sire," added the chancellor, with the most diabolical address, "I am persuaded that M. de Choiseul is the most honourable man in the world, and that he would shudder at the bare idea of any attempt upon the life of your majesty; but his relations, friends, and creatures believe, that, supported by the dauphiness, he would continue in office under your successor. Who can answer for their honour? Who can assure you, that some one among them may not do that for the duke which he would never venture to attempt himself?

"This is the personal danger your majesty runs so long as M. de Choiseul continues in office; were he dismissed, the world would soon abandon the disgraced minister, and the dauphiness be amongst the first to forget him."

The king was pale with agitation, and for some minutes continued traversing the apartment with hasty strides; then he suddenly stopped,

« You are then convinced, M. de Maupeou, » cried he, « that the duke is leagued with the parliaments to weaken my authority ? »

« There are palpable proofs to that effect, » replied the chancellor; « your majesty may recollect the skilful manner in which, on the 3d of last September, he avoided attending you to parliament; most assuredly, had he not been the friend of rebels, he would not have shrunk from evincing by his presence how fully he shared your just indignation. »

« That is but too true, » cried Louis XV.; « and I felt much annoyed at the time, that he preferred going to amuse himself at the house of M. de Laborde, when his duty summoned him to my side. »

« Your majesty cannot fail to perceive how everything condemns him; his personal conduct, equally with that of his sister, proves how little he regards his royal master's interest; and should your clemency resolve upon sparing him now, you may find your mercy produce fatal effects to yourself. »

« His dismissal, » resumed the king, « would disorganize all my political measures. Who could I put in his place ? I know no one capable of filling it. »

« Your majesty's wisdom must decide the point, » replied the chancellor. « My duty is to lay before you the true state of things; this I have done, and I know myself well enough not to intrude my counsel further. Nevertheless, I cannot help remarking, that in your majesty's court there are many as capable as M. de Choiseul of directing affairs — M. d'Aiguillon, for example. »

« Ah ! » answered Louis XV.; « this is not the moment, when M. d'Aiguillon is smarting from his severe contest with the long robes, to elevate him over the head of my hitherto-esteemed minister. »

M. de Maupeou and myself perceived that we should best serve my friend's cause by refraining from pressing the matter further, and we therefore changed the conversation. Nevertheless, as what had already passed had taken its full effect upon the king's mind, he suggested an idea which I should never have dreamed of recommending; and that was to consult the abbé de la Ville on the subject.

The abbé de la Ville, head clerk of foreign affairs, was a man who, at the advanced period of fourscore, preserved all the fire and vivacity of youth; he was acquainted with ministerial affairs even better than M. de Choiseul himself. Having formerly belonged to the Jesuits, to whom he was entirely devoted, he had appeared to accelerate the period of their destruction; never had he been able to pardon his patron the frightful part he had compelled him to enact in the business. Years had not weakened his ancient rancour, and it might be said, that he had clung to life with more than natural pertinacity, as unwilling to lay it down till he had avenged himself on de Choiseul. Louis XV. wrote to him, desiring he would avail himself of the first pretext that occurred to request an audience. This note was forwarded by a footman, the good abbé easily divined that this mystery concealed some great design; he therefore hastened to solicit an audience as desired. When introduced into the cabinet of the king, his majesty inquired at once,

"Monsieur l'abbé, can I depend upon your discretion?"

"Sire," replied the abbé, with a blunt frankness, "I am sorry your majesty can doubt it."

"Be satisfied, sir," replied the king, "I had no intention to offend you; but I wish to consult you upon a point, the importance of which you will fully appreciate; answer me without disguise. Do you believe that the services of the duc de Choiseul are useful to my kingdom, and that my interests would suffer were I to dismiss him?"

"Sire," replied M. de la Ville, without hesitation, "I protest to you, as a man of honour, that the presence of the duc de Choiseul is by no means essential to the ministry, and that your majesty's interests would sustain not the slightest injury by his absence."

After this the abbé de la Ville entered into particulars unnecessary to repeat here; it is sufficient to say, that all he advanced materially aided our wishes. He afterwards reaped the reward of his friendly services, for when the duc d'Aiguillon had displaced the duc de Choiseul, he bestowed on M. de la Ville the title of *director of foreign affairs*, an office created for him, and the bishopric *in partibus* of Tricomie. The good abbé did not, however, long enjoy his honours, but ended his career in 1774.

This conversation had been repeated to me; and, on my side, I left no means untried of preventing Louis XV. from placing further confidence in his minister; but, feeble and timid, he knew not on what to determine, contenting himself with treating the duke coolly; he sought, by continual rebuffs and denials to his slightest request, to compel him to demand that dismissal he had not the courage to give.

Whilst these things were in agitation, madame de Mirepoix, who had been for some days absent from Versailles, came to call upon me. This lady possessed a considerable share of wit; and, although on the most intimate terms with me, had not altogether broken off with the des Choiseuls, to whom she was further bound on account of the prince de Beauvau, her brother. It therefore excited in me no surprise, when I heard that the des Choiseuls had called on her to ascertain, whether it would not be possible, through her mediation, to come to some terms with me.

« And you must not be angry with me,» continued she, « for undertaking the *negotiation;* I well foresaw all the difficulties, and entertained no hopes of its success, but upon second thoughts, I considered it better I should accept the mission; for, in case of a negative being returned, it will be safe in my keeping, and I will not add to the chagrin of a failure the shame of a defeat.»

« It is my opinion,» replied I, « that all propositions coming from these people should be rejected; they have compelled me to raise between them and myself an immense wall of hatred, not less difficult to surmount than the grand wall of China.»

« Yet, » replied the maréchale, smiling, « they are disposed to pay any price for so doing. »

« I have friends, » said I, « from whom I can never separate myself. »

« They are willing that your friends shall be theirs likewise, » cried she, « for they see that M. de Maupeou, the duc de la Vrillière, and the abbé Terray, are provided for, and that the duc d'Aiguillon alone remains to be suitably established; M. de Choiseul would be happy to aid him in obtaining the post of minister of naval affairs. »

« Well, and the duchesse de Grammont, » inquired I, « would she visit me ? »

« Oh, as to that, I know nothing about it, and can venture no opinion; my commission does not extend so far. »

« I understand you, » said I; « she seeks for peace only as it would enable her the better to carry on her hostilities against me. I am sorry, madame la maréchale, that I cannot accept your terms for a reconciliation. »

« Remember, I pray of you, that I have been an ambassadress, and nothing more, » said madame de Mirepoix; « recollect I have spoken to you in the words of others, not my own. I must beg of you to be secret; if you divulge the particulars of this morning's conversation, it is I who will suffer by it: your friends will be displeased with me for my interference; and I have no inclination to provoke the anger of a party so powerful as yours. »

I promised the maréchale to observe an inviolable secrecy; and, so well have I kept my promise, that you are the first person to whom I ever breathed one syllable of the affair. I must own, that it struck me as strange, that the duc de Choiseul should abandon his cousin, and consent to take his seat beside the duc d'Aiguillon, whom he detested: perhaps he only sought to deceive us all by gaining time, till the death of the king. But what avails speculation upon the words and actions of a courtier, whose heart is an abyss too deep for gleam of light to penetrate ?

CHAPTER XXVI.

Baron d'Oigny, general post-master — The king and the countess read the opened letters — The disgrace of de Choiseul resolved upon — *Lettre de cachet* — Anecdote — Spectre of Philip II., king of Spain — The duc de Choiseul banished — Visits to Chanteloup — The princesses — The dauphin and dauphiness — Candidates for the ministry.

THE interference of madame de Mirepoix, originating, as it did, in the duc de Choiseul, let me at once into the secret of his fears and the extent of my own power. The knowledge of the weakness of my adversary redoubled my energy; and from this moment, I allowed no day to pass without forwarding the great work, till I succeeded in effecting the duke's ruin and securing my own triumph. The pamphleteers in the pay of my enemies, and those who merely copied these hirelings, assert that one evening after supper, when Louis was intoxicated with wine and my seductions, I prevailed upon him to sign a *lettre de cachet* against his minister, which he immediately revoked when the break of day had restored to him his senses. This was a malicious falsehood. You shall hear the exact manner in which the *lettres de cachet* were signed.

On the evening of the 23d of December, his majesty having engaged to sup with me, I had invited M. de Maupeou, the duc de la Vrillière, and the prince de Soubise. It appears, that the king, previously to coming, had gone to visit the dauphiness; he had not mentioned whither he was going, so that his attendants believed him to be in my apartments, and directed M. d'Oigny, post-master general to seek him there. The baron brought with him a packet of opened letters; when he saw me alone he wished to retire, for the servants, believing him to be one of the expected guests, had ushered him in. However, I would not permit him to go until the king's arrival; and, half sportively, half seriously, I took from him his letters, protesting I would detain them as hostages for his obedience to my desires. At this moment Louis XV. entered the room; and M. d'Oigny, having briefly stated his business, bowed and departed. The baron was a very excellent man, possessing an extensive and intelligent mind; he wrote very pleasing poetry, and had not his attention been occupied by the post he filled, he might have made a conspicuous figure in literature.

When we were left to ourselves, I said to the king,

« Now, then, for this interesting and amusing budget; for such, I doubt not, it will prove. »

« Not so fast, madam, if you please, » replied Louis XV.; « perhaps these papers may contain state secrets unfit for your eye. »

« Great secrets they must be, » said I, laughing, « confided thus to the carelessness of the post. » So saying, I broke the seal of the envelope so hastily, that the greater part of the letters and notes were scattered over the carpet.

« Well done, » cried the king.

« I entreat your majesty's pardon, » said I, « but I will repair the mischief as far as I can. »

I stooped to collect the fallen papers, and the king had the gallantry to assist me: we soon piled the various letters upon a tray, and began eagerly to glance over their contents. My good fortune made me select from the mass those epistles addressed to the members of the country parliaments; they were filled with invectives against me, insulting mention of the king, and praises of the duc de Choiseul. I took especial care to read them in a loud and distinct voice.

« This really is not to be endured, » cried Louis XV.; « that the mistaken zeal of these long-robed gentlemen should make them thus compliment my minister at my expense. »

« So much the worse for you, sire, » replied I, « considering that you continue to prefer your minister to every other consideration. »

As I continued searching through the letters, I found and read the following phrase:—

«Spite of the reports in circulation, I do not believe it possible that M. de Choiseul will be dismissed; he is too necessary to the king, who, without him, would be as incapable as a child of managing his affairs: his majesty must preserve our friend in office in spite of himself.»

When I had finished, the king exclaimed, in an angry tone, «We shall see how far the prophecy of these sapient gentlemen is correct, and whether their 'friend' is so important to me that I dare not dismiss him. Upon my word, my minister has placed himself so advantageously before his master, as to exclude him entirely from the eyes of his subjects.»

Whilst these words were speaking, M. de Maupeou and M. de la Vrillière were announced; the king, still warm, let fall some words expressive of his displeasure at what had happened. The gauntlet was thrown; and so well did we work upon the irritated mind of Louis XV., that it was determined M. de Choiseul should be dismissed the following day, December 24, 1770. Chanteloup was chosen for the place of his retreat, and M. de la Vrillière, by the dictation of the king, wrote the following letter to the duke:—

«COUSIN,—The dissatisfaction caused me by your conduct compels me to request you will confine yourself to your estate at Chanteloup, whither you will remove in four and twenty hours from the date hereof. I should have chosen a more remote spot for your place of exile, were it not for the great esteem I entertain for the duchesse de Choiseul, in whose delicate health I feel much interest. Have a care that you do not, by your own conduct, oblige me to adopt harsher measures; and hereupon I pray God to have you in his keeping.»

(Signed) «LOUIS,
(and lower down) «PHILIPPEAUX.»

When this letter was completed, I said to the king,

«Surely, sire, you do not mean to forget the duke's faithful ally, M. de Praslin? It would ill become us to detain him when the head of the family has taken leave of us.»

« You are right,» replied the king, smiling; « besides, an old broom taken from a masthead would be as useful to us as he would.»

Then, turning to M. de la Vrillière, the king dictated the following laconic notice: —

> « Cousin, — I have no further occasion for your services; I exile you to Praslin, and expect you will repair thither within four and twenty hours after the receipt of this.»

« Short and sweet,» cried I.

« Now let us drop the subject,» said Louis; « let madame de Choiseul repose in peace to-night, and to-morrow morning, at eleven o'clock, go yourself, M. de la Vrillière, and carry my orders to the duke, and bring back his staff of office.»

« To whom will you give it, sire ?» inquired the chancellor.

« I have not yet considered the subject,» replied the king.

At this instant M. de Soubise was announced. « *Motus !* » exclaimed the king, as M. de Soubise, little suspecting the nature of our conversation, entered the room. I profited by his coming to slip out of the room into my boudoir, from which I despatched the following note to M. d'Aiguillon:

> « My dear duke,— Victoria! We are conquerors; master and man quit Paris to-morrow. We shall replace them by our friends; and you best know whether you are amongst the number of them.»

When I returned to the drawing-room, the king exclaimed,

« Come, madam, you are waited for; the prince de Soubise has a very curious anecdote to relate, which befell a lady of his acquaintance; I begged of him to defer telling it till you rejoined us.»

« Are you afraid of ghosts ?» inquired the maréchal of me.

« Not this evening,» replied I; « to-morrow, perhaps, or the next day, I may be.»

This jest amused the king and the duc de la Vrillière, whilst M. de Maupeou, who seemed to fear lest I should by any indiscretion, reveal our secret, made a signal of impatience; to which I replied, by shrugging up my shoulders. Poor M. de Soubise, although he did not comprehend my joke, laughed at it as heartily as the rest who saw its application. "Oh! you courtier," thought I. We then entreated of him to commence the recital of his tale, which he did in the following words —

"There is in Lower Brittany a family gifted with a most singular endowment: each member of the family, male or female, is warned exactly one month previous to his or her decease of the precise hour and day in which it will take place. A lady belonging to this peculiar race was visiting me rather more than a month since; we were conversing quietly together, when, all at once, she uttered a loud cry, arose from her seat, endeavoured to walk across the room, but fell senseless upon the floor. Much grieved and surprised at this scene, I hastily summoned my servants, who bestowed upon the unfortunate lady the utmost attention, but it was long ere she revived. I then wished to persuade her to take some rest. 'No,' cried she, rising and giving me orders for her immediate departure, 'I have not sufficient time for rest; scarcely will the short period between me and eternity allow me to set my affairs in order.' Surprised at this language, I begged of her to explain herself. 'You are aware,' said she, 'of the fatal power possessed by my family; well, at the moment in which I was sitting beside you on this sofa, happening to cast my eyes on the mirror opposite, I saw myself as a corpse wrapped in the habiliments of death, and partly covered with a black and white drapery; beside me was an open coffin. This is sufficient; I have no time to lose: farewell, my friend, we shall meet no more.' Thunderstruck at these words, I suffered the lady to depart without attempting to combat her opinion. This morning I received intelligence from her son that the prophecy had been fulfilled — she was no more."

When the maréchal had finished, I exclaimed,

"You have told us a sad dismal tale; I really fear I shall not be able to close my eyes at all to-night for thinking of it."

« We must think of some means of keeping up your spirits,» answered Louis XV. « As for your story, maréchal, it does not surprise me; things equally inexplicable are continually taking place. I read in a letter addressed by Philip V., of Spain, to Louis XIV., that the spirit of Philip II., founder of the Escurial, wanders at certain intervals around that building. Philip V. affirms that he himself witnessed the apparition of the spectre of the king.»

At this moment supper was announced. « Come, gentlemen,» said I, « let us seek to banish these gloomy ideas around our festive board.» Upon which the king conducted me to the supper-room, the rest of the company following us. Spite of all my efforts to be gay, and induce others to be so likewise, the conversation still lingered upon this dismal subject.

« Heaven grant,» exclaimed the chancellor, « that I may not soon have to dread a visit from the ghost of the deceased parliament; however, if such were the case, it would not prevent my sleeping.»

« Oh!» cried the king, « these long-robed gentlemen have often more effectually robbed me of sleep than all the spectres in the world could do; yet one night — »

« Well, sire,» said I, seeing that Louis was silent, « and what happened to you that night?»

« Nothing that I can repeat,» answered Louis XV., glancing around with a mournful look.

A dead silence followed, which lasted several minutes; and this evening, which was to usher my day of triumph, passed away in the most inconceivable dullness. What most contributed to render me uneasy was the reflection, that, at the very moment when we had freed ourselves of our enemies, we were ignorant who would fill their vacant places. This was an error, and a great one. My friends would not listen to the nomination of the comte de Broglie, the comte de Maillebois, the duc de la Vauguyon, any more than either M. de Soubise or M. de Castries. The abbé Terray, having upon one occasion proposed the maréchal duc de Richelieu, he very narrowly escaped having his face scratched by M. d'Aiguillon, who cared very little for his dear uncle; but I have unintentionally wandered from the thread of my narrative; I will therefore resume it at once.

I had hoped that the king would this night have retired to his own apartment, and that I should have been enabled to hold a secret council with M. de Maupeou, and the ducs de la Vrillière and d'Aiguillon; but no such thing. Imagining, no doubt, that I should be kept awake by my fear of ghosts, his majesty insisted upon remaining with me, and I was compelled to acquiesce. He passed a very agitated night, much more occupied with the des Choiseuls than me; he could think of nothing, speak of nothing, but the sensation which their disgrace would produce; he seemed to dread his family, the nobility, the nation, Europe, and the whole world. I strove to re-assure him, and to inspire him with fresh courage; and, when he quitted me in the morning, I felt convinced that he would not again alter his determination.

As soon as Louis XV. had left me, comte Jean entered. Although concealed behind the curtain, and apparently not on the best terms with me, my brother-in-law nevertheless directed my actions, and gave me most excellent advice. It was not long ere the duc d'Aiguillon arrived; he had seen M. de Maupeou during the night, and learned from him the exile of the late minister, but beyond that fact he knew nothing. He inquired of me, with much uneasiness, whether anything had been decided in his behalf. I replied, that the king was as yet undecided in his choice of ministers, but that, if the duc d'Aiguillon came into office, he would, in all probability, be nominated to the administration of foreign affairs: the direction of the war-office had been my noble friend's ardent desire.

Whilst we were thus conversing together on the 24th of December, 1770, eleven o'clock struck; and we could, from the windows, perceive M. de la Vrillière taking his way towards that part of the building occupied by M. de Choiseul when at the castle. This latter was in conversation with M. Conzié, bishop of Arras, when the arrival of the duc de la Vrillière, bearing the king's commands, was signified to him. The prelate, not doubting but the mission related to affairs of importance, took his leave; M. de la Vrillière then presented the *lettre de cachet*, accompanying it with some remarks of his own upon the talents of the minister, and his regret at being selected for so unpleasant an office. "A truce to your feigned regrets, my lord duke," replied the disgraced minister, sarcastically, "I am well assured my dismissal could not have been brought me by hands more ready to discharge the trust than yours." Saying this, M. de Choiseul placed his credentials in the hands of the duke, and slightly bowing, turned his back upon him, as though he had forgotten his presence. M. de Choiseul then retired to summon his sister, to communicate to her and his wife the misfortune which had befallen him: he then set out for Paris, to make the necessary preparations for removing to Chanteloup. There an officer from the king, charged to accompany him to his place of exile, gave him his majesty's orders that he should see no person, and receive no visits.

This order did not proceed from me, but was the work of the duc de la Vrillière, who sought, by this paltry action, to avenge himself upon M. de Choiseul for the reception he had given him. It was wholly useless, however; for in the exile of the duke was seen a thing unheard of, perhaps, before, and, in all probability, unlikely ever to occur again — the sight of a whole court espousing the part of an exiled minister, and openly censuring the monarch who could thus reward his services. You, no doubt, remember equally well as myself the long file of carriages that for two days blocked up the road to Chanteloup. In vain did Louis XV. express his dissatisfaction; his court flocked in crowds to visit M. de Choiseul.

On the other hand, the castle was not in a more tranquil state. At the news of the dismissal and banishment of M. de Choiseul, a general hue and cry was raised against me and my friends: one might have supposed, by the clamours it occasioned, that the ex-minister had been the atlas of the monarchy; and that, deprived of his succour, the state must fall into ruins. The princesses were loud in their anger, and accused me publicly of having conspired against virtue itself! The virtue of such a sister and brother! I ask you, my friend, is not the idea truly ludicrous?

The dauphiness bewailed his fall with many tears; at least, so I was informed by a lady of her suite, madame de Campan. This lady was a most loquacious person; she frequently visited my sister-in-law; and, thanks to her love of talking, we were always well-informed of all that was passing in the household of Marie Antoinette. However, the dauphin was far from sharing the grief of his illustrious spouse. When informed of the dismissal of the duke, he cried out, "Well, madame du Barry has saved me an infinity of trouble — that of getting rid of so dangerous a man, in the event of my ever ascending the throne." The prince did not usually speak of me in the most flattering terms, but I forgave him on the present occasion, so much was I charmed with his expression relative to the late minister; it afforded me the certainty that I should not have to dread the possibility of his recalling de Choiseul.

Whilst many were bewailing the downfall of the des Choiseuls, others, who had an eye more to self-interest, presented themselves to share in the spoils of his fortune. There were the princes de Soubise and de Condé, the duc de la Vauguyon, the comtes de Broglie, de Maillebois, and de Castries, the marquis de Monteynard, and many others, equally anxious for a tempting slice of the ministry, and who would have made but one mouthful of the finest and best.

The marquise de l'Hôpital came to solicit my interest for the prince de Soubise, her lover. I replied, that his majesty would rather have the maréchal for his friend than his minister; that, in fact, the different appointments had taken place; and that, if the names of the parties were not immediately divulged, it was to spare the feelings of certain aspirants to the ministry: madame de l'Hôpital withdrew, evidently much disconcerted at my reply. Certainly M. de Soubise must have lost his reason, when he supposed that the successor of M. de Choiseul would be himself, the most insignificant prince of France; he only could suppose that he was equal to such an elevation. However this may be, he took upon himself to behave very much like an offended person for some days; but, finding such a line of conduct produced no good, he came round again, and presented himself as usual at my parties, whilst I received him as though nothing had occurred.

I had more difficulty in freeing myself from the importunities of Messieurs de Broglie and de Maillebois. I had given to each of them a sort of promise; I had allowed them to hope, and yet, when the time came to realize these hopes, I told them, that I possessed much less influence than was generally imagined; to which they replied, that they knew my power to serve them was much greater than I appeared to believe. After a while, I succeeded in deadening the expectations of M. de Broglie, but M. de Maillebois was long ere he would abandon his pursuit. When every chance of success had left him, he gave way to so much violence and bitterness against M. d'Aiguillon, that the duke was compelled to punish him for his impudent rage. I will mention the other candidates for the ministry at another opportunity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The comte de la Marche and the comtesse du Barry — The countess and the prince de Condé — The duc de la Vauguyon and the countess — Provisional minister — Refusal of the secretaryship of war — Displeasure of the king — The maréchale de Mirepoix — Unpublished letter from Voltaire to madame du Barry — Her reply.

The comte de la Marche had always evinced the warmest regard for me, and he sought, on the present occasion, to be repaid for his attachment. Both he and the prince de Condé had their ambitious speculations in the present change of ministers; and both fancied, that because their relation, the duke, had governed during the king's minority, the right to the several appointments now vacant, belonged as a matter of course to their family. The count had already sent to solicit my interest, through the mediation of madame de Monaco, mistress to the prince de Condé; and, as I shrewdly suspect, the occasional *chère amie* of himself. Finding this measure did not produce all the good he expected, he came, without further preface, to speak to me himself about it. Unwilling to come to an open rupture with him, I endeavoured to make him comprehend, that the policy of the sovereign would never permit his placing any of the administrative power in the hands of the princes of his family; that he had consented, most reluctantly, to investing them with military command, and that it would be fruitless to urge more.

The comte de la Marche appeared struck by the justness of my arguments; he replied,

"Well, madam, since I cannot be a minister, I must e'en give up my wishes; but, for the love of heaven, intreat of the king to bestow his favours in the shape of a little pecuniary aid. Things look ill at present; they may take a worse turn, but he may confidently rely on my loyalty and devotion: the supreme courts, driven to the last extremity, will make a stand, and princes and peers will range themselves under the banners. We well know how much this resistance will displease his majesty; I pledge myself never to forsake your cause, but to defend it with my life; that is, if my present pressing necessity for money be satisfied. How say you, madam; can you procure it for me?"

"Very probably I may be enabled to assist you," replied I; "but you must first inform me how much will satisfy you."

"Oh," answered he, carelessly, "something less than the mines of Peru will suffice; I am not extravagant, and merely ask for so much as is absolutely necessary. In the first place 60,000 livres paid down, and, secondly, a yearly payment of 200,000 more."

This demand did not appear to me unreasonable, and I undertook to arrange the matter to the prince's satisfaction, well pleased on my own side to secure so illustrious an ally at so cheap a rate. I procured the assent of the king and the comptroller-general; the 60,000 livres were bestowed on the comte de la Marche in two separate payments, the pension settled on him, and, still further, an annuity of 30,000 livres was secured to madame de Monaco; and I must do the count the justice to say, that he remained faithful to our cause amidst every danger and difficulty; braving alike insults, opprobrium, and the torrent of pamphlets and epigrams of which he was the object; in fact, we had good reason for congratulating ourselves upon securing such devotion and zeal at so poor a price.

The prince de Condé, surrounded by a greater degree of worldly state and consideration, was equally important to us, although in another way. He had in some degree compromised popularity by attaching himself to me from the commencement of my court favour, and the reception he bestowed on me at Chantilly had completed his disgrace in the eyes of nobility. He visited at my house upon the most friendly footing; and whenever he found me alone, he would turn the conversation upon politics, the state of affairs, and the great desire he felt to undertake the direction of them in concert with me; he would add, « You might play the part of madame de Pompadour, and yet you content yourself with merely attempting to do so; you are satisfied with possessing influence when you might exercise power and command. Your alliance with a prince of the blood would render you sole mistress in this kingdom; and should I ever arrive, through your means, to the rank of prime minister, it would be my pleasure and pride to submit all things to you, and from this accord would spring an authority which nothing could weaken.»

I listened in silence, and, for once, my natural frankness received a check; for I durst not tell him all I knew of the king's sentiments towards him. The fact was, Louis XV. was far from feeling any regard for the prince de Condé; and, not to mince the matter, had unequivocally expressed his contempt for him. He often said to me, when speaking of him, « He is a conceited fellow, who would fain induce persons to believe him somebody of vast importance.» Louis XV. had prejudices, from which no power on earth could have weaned him; and the princes of the house of Condé were amongst his strongest antipathies: he knew a score of scandalous anecdotes relating to them, which he took no small pleasure in repeating.

However, all the arguments of the prince de Condé were useless, and produced him nothing, or, at least, nothing for himself, although he procured the nomination of another to the ministry, as you will hear in its proper place; but this was not sufficient to allay the cravings of his ambition; and, in his rage and disappointment, when open war was proclaimed between the king and his parliament, he ranged himself on the side of the latter. He soon, however, became weary of his new allies; and, once more abandoning himself to the guidance of interest, he rejoined our party. Well did M. de Maupeou know men, when he said they all had their price; and great as may be the rank and title of princes, with plenty of money, they too may be had.

But amongst all the candidates for the ministry, the one who occasioned me the greatest trouble was the duc de la Vauguyon, who insisted upon it that he had done much for me, and complained bitterly of his unrequited services, and of my having bestowed my confidence on others. Up to the moment of the disgrace of the des Choiseuls, he had been amongst the most bitter of the malcontents; but no sooner were they banished from court than M. de la Vauguyon forgot every thing, and hastened to me with every mark of the warmest friendship.

"Ah!" exclaimed he, "I have much to scold you for, but I will forgive you all your past misdeeds, if you will perform your promise to me."

"My dear father," cried I (for I used jestingly to style him so, in the same manner as I designated the bishop of Orleans *gros père*), "are you, indeed displeased with me? That is very naughty: for you know I love you with all my heart."

"If it be true that you entertain any regard for me, why have you evinced so little towards me? Am I not of the right materials for making ministers? Why, then, have you never procured my appointment to any of the vacant situations?"

"Stay, stay, my dear father," cried I; "how you run on! To hear you talk, any person would suppose that places and appointments rained down upon me, and that I had only to say to you, my dear duke, choose which you please; then, indeed, you might complain with justice; but you know very well, that all these delightful things are in the hands of the king, who alone has a right to bestow them as he judges best, whilst I am wholly powerless in the business."

"Say, rather," replied the duke, quickly, "that you find it suits your present purpose to put on this want of power. We all know, that your veto is absolute with his majesty, and it requires nothing more to obtain whatsoever you desire."

The duc de la Vauguyon was powerful, and represented the whole of a party — that of the religionists, which was still further supported by the *princesses;* but for this very reason the triumvirate, consisting of messieurs d'Aiguillon, de Maupeou, and the abbé Terray, would not have accepted his services at any price.

The good duke returned several times to the charge; sometimes endeavouring to move me by gentle intreaties, and, at others, holding out threats and menaces; good and bad words flowed from his lips like a mixture of honey and gall; but when he found that both were equally thrown away upon me, he retired offended; and by the expression of his rage and disappointment, succeeded in incensing both the dauphin and dauphiness against me. May heaven preserve you, my friend, from the anger of a bigot!

I think I have detained you long enough with the relation of the intrigues by which I was surrounded upon the dismissal of the des Choiseuls, and I will now return to the morning of the 24th of December. When the exiles were fairly out of Paris, the king found himself not a little embarrassed in the choice of a prime minister. Those who would have suited our purposes did not meet with the king's approbation, and he had not yet sufficient courage to venture upon electing one who should be disagreeable to us; he therefore hit upon a curious provisional election; the abbé Terray, for instance, was placed at the head of the war department. This measure was excused by the assertion, that it would require the head of a financier to look into and settle the accounts, which the late minister had, no doubt, left in a very confused state. Upon the same principle, M. Bertin was appointed to the direction of foreign affairs, and M. de Boynes was invested solely with the management of naval affairs. This man, who was counsellor of state, and first president of the parliament of Besançon, knew not a letter of the office thus bestowed upon him, but then he was bound body and soul to the chancellor; and it was worth something to have a person who, it might be relied on, would offer no opposition to the important reforms which were to be set on foot immediately. We required merely automata, and M. de Boynes answered our purpose perfectly well; for a provisional minister nothing could have been better.

The king had at length (in his own opinion), hit upon a very excellent minister of war; and the person selected was the chevalier, afterwards comte de Muy, formerly usher to the late dauphin: he was a man of the old school, possessing many sterling virtues and qualities. We were in the utmost terror when his majesty communicated to us his election of a minister of war, and declared his intention of immediately signifying his pleasure to M. de Muy. Such a blow would have overthrown all our projects. Happily chance befriended us; the modern Cato declared that he should esteem himself most honored to serve his sovereign by every possible endeavour, but that he could never be induced to enter my service upon any pretext whatever. The strangeness of this refusal puzzled Louis XV. not a little. He said to me, "Can you make out the real motive of this silly conduct? I had a better opinion of the man; I thought him possessed of sense, but I see now that he is only fit for the cowl of a monk; he will never be a minister." The king was mistaken; M. de Muy became one under the auspices of his successor.

Immediately that the prince de Condé was informed of what had passed, he recommenced his attack; and finding he could not be minister himself, he determined, at least, to be principally concerned in the appointment of one; he therefore proposed the marquis de Monteynard, a man of such negative qualities, that the best that could be said of him was, that he was as incapable of a bad as of a good action; and, for want of a better, he was elected. Such were the colleagues given to M. de Maupeou to conduct the war which was about to be declared against the parliaments. I should tell you, *en passant*, that the discontent of the magistracy had only increased, and that the parliament of Paris had even finished by refusing to decide the suits which were referred to them; thus punishing the poor litigants for their quarrel with the minister.

Meanwhile, the general interest expressed for the duc de Choiseul greatly irritated the king.

«Who would have thought,» said he to me, «that a disgraced minister could have been so idolized by a whole court? Would you believe that I receive a hundred petitions a day for leave to visit at Chanteloup? This is something new indeed! I cannot understand it.»

«Sire,» replied I, «that only proves how much danger you incurred by keeping such a man in your employment.»

«Why, yes,» answered Louis XV.; «it really seems as though, had he chosen some fine morning to propose my abdicating the throne in favour of the dauphin, he would only have needed to utter the suggestion to have it carried into execution. Fortunately for me, my grandson is by no means partial to him, and will most certainly never recall him after my death. The dauphin possesses all the obstinacy of persons of confined understanding: he has but slender judgment, and will see with no eyes but his own.»

Louis XV. augured ill of his successor's reign, and imagined that the cabinet of Vienna would direct that of Versailles at pleasure. His late majesty was mistaken; Louis XVI. is endowed with many rare virtues, but they are unfortunately clouded over by his timidity and want of self-confidence.

The open and undisguised censure passed by the whole court upon the conduct of Louis XV. was not the only thing which annoyed his majesty, who perpetually tormented himself with conjectures of what the rest of Europe would say and think of his late determinations.

«I will engage,» said he, «that I am finely pulled to pieces at Potsdam. My dear brother Frederick is about as sweet-tempered as a bear, and I must not dismiss a minister who is displeasing to me without his passing a hundred comments and sarcastic remarks. Still, as he is absolute as the Medes and Persians, surely he can have no objection to us poor monarchs imitating him: and allow me the same privilege in mine. After all, why should I need his or any other person's opinion; let the whole world applaud or condemn, I shall still act according to my own best judgment."

On my side I was far from feeling quite satisfied with the accounts I continued to receive from Chanteloup; above all, I felt irritated at the parade of attachment made by the prince de Beauvau for the exiles, and I complained bitterly of it to the maréchale de Mirepoix.

"What can I do to help it," said she; "my sister-in-law is a simpleton; who, after having ruined her brother, will certainly cause the downfall of her husband. I beseech you, my dear, out of regard for me, to put up with the unthinking conduct of the prince de Beauvau for a little while; he will soon see his error and amend it." He did indeed return to our party, but his obedience was purchased at a heavy price.

Some days after the disgrace of the duc de Choiseul, I received a letter from M. de Voltaire. This writer, who carped at and attacked all subjects, whether sacred or profane, and from whose satires neither great nor small were exempt, had continual need of some powerful friend at court. When his protector, M. de Choiseul, was dismissed, he saw clearly enough that the only person on whom he could henceforward depend to aid and support him, was she who had been chiefly instrumental in removing his first patron. With these ideas he addressed to me the following letter of condolence or, to speak more correctly, of congratulation. It was as follows: —

"MADAME LA COMTESSE, — Fame, with her hundred tongues, has announced to me in my retreat the fall of M. de Choiseul and your triumph. This piece of news has not occasioned me much surprise; I always believed in the potency of beauty to carry all before it; but, shall I confess it? I scarcely know whether I ought to congratulate myself on the success you have obtained over your enemies. M. de Choiseul was one of my kindest friends, and his all-powerful protection sufficed to sustain me against the malice of my numerous enemies. May a humble creature like me flatter himself with the hope of finding in you the same generous support? for when the god Mars is no longer to be found, what can be more natural than to seek the aid of Pallas, the goddess of the fine arts? Will she refuse to protect with her ægis the most humble of her adorers?

"Permit me, madam, to avail myself of this opportunity to lay at your feet the assurance of my most respectful devotion. I dare not give utterance to all my prayers in your behalf, because I am open to a charge of infidelity from some, yet none shall ever detect me unfaithful in my present professions; at my age, 'tis time our choice was made, and our affections fixed. Be assured, lovely countess, that I shall ever remain your attached friend; and that no day will pass without my teaching the echoes of the Alps to repeat your much-esteemed name.

«I have the honour to remain, madam, yours, etc., etc.»

You may be quite sure, my friend, that I did not allow so singular an epistle to remain long unanswered. I replied to it in the following words:—

«SIR,—The perusal of your agreeable letter made me almost grieve for the disgrace of the duc de Choiseul. Be assured, that to his own conduct, and that of his family, may be alone attributed the misfortune you deplore.

«The regrets you so feelingly express for the calamity which has befallen your late protector do honour to your generous heart; but recollect that your old friends were not the only persons who could appreciate and value your fine talents; to be esteemed worthy the honourable appellation of your patron is a glory which the proudest might envy; and, although I cannot boast of being a Minerva, who, after all, was possibly no wiser than the rest of us, I shall always feel proud and happy to serve you with my utmost credit and influence.

«I return you my best thanks for the wishes you express, and the attachment you so kindly profess. You honour me too much by repeating my name amidst the bosom of the Alps! be assured, that I shall not be behindhand in making the saloons of Paris and Versailles resound with yours. Had I leisure for the undertaking, I would go and teach it to the only mountain worthy of re-echoing it —at the foot of Parnassus.

«I am, sir, yours, etc., etc.»

You perceive, my friend, that I intended this reply should be couched in the wittiest style imaginable, yet, upon reading it over at this lapse of time, it appears to me the silliest thing ever penned; nevertheless, I flattered myself I had caught the tone and manner in which M. de Voltaire had addressed me: he perceived my intention, and was delighted with the flattering deference it expressed. You know the vanity of men of letters; and M. de Voltaire, as the first writer of the age, possessed, in proportion, the largest portion of conceit.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A few words respecting Jean Jacques Rousseau — The comtesse du Barry is desirous of his acquaintance — The countess visits Jean Jacques Rousseau — His household furniture — His portrait — Thérèse — A second visit from madame du Barry to Jean Jacques Rousseau — The countess relates her visit to the king — Billet from J. J. Rousseau to madame du Barry — The two duchesses d'Aiguillon.

SPITE of the little estimation in which I held men of letters, generally speaking, you must not take it for granted that I entertained an equal indifference for all these gentlemen. I have already, I fear, tired your patience when dwelling upon my ardent admiration of M. de Voltaire; I have now to speak to you of that with which his illustrious rival, Jean Jacques Rousseau, inspired me; the man who, after a life so filled with constant trouble and misfortunes, died a few years since in so deplorable a manner. At the period of which I am now speaking this man, who had filled Europe with his fame, was living at Paris, in a state bordering upon indigence. I must here mention, that it was owing to my solicitation that he had been permitted to return from his exile, I having successfully interceded for him with the chancellor and the attorney-general. M. Seguier made no difficulty to my request, because he looked upon Jean Jacques Rousseau as the greatest enemy to a set of men whom he mortally hated — the philosophers. Neither did M. de Maupeou, from the moment he effected the overthrow of the parliament, see any objection to bestowing his protection upon a man whom the parliaments had exiled. In this manner, therefore, without his being aware of it, Rousseau owed to me the permission to re-enter Paris. Spite of the mortifying terms in which this celebrated writer had spoken of the king's mistresses, I had a lively curiosity to know him; all that his enemies repeated of his uncouthness, and even of his malicious nature, far from weakening the powerful interest with which he inspired me, rather augmented it, by strengthening the idea I had previously formed of his having been greatly calumniated. The generous vengeance which he had recently taken for the injuries he had received from Voltaire particularly charmed me.* I thought only how I could effect my design of seeing him by one means or another, and in this resolution I was confirmed by an accident which befell me one day.

It was the commencement of April, 1771, I was reading for the fourth time, the «*Nouvelle Héloïse*,» and for the tenth, or, probably, twelfth, the account of the party on the lake, when the maréchale de Mirepoix entered the room. I laid my open volume on the mantel-piece, and the maréchale, glancing her eye upon the book I had just put down, smilingly begged my pardon for disturbing my grave studies, and taking it in her hand, exclaimed,

«Ah! I see you have been perusing '*La Nouvelle Héloïse*'; I have just been having more than an hour's conversation respecting its author.»

«What were you saying of him?» asked I.

«Why, my dear, I happened to be at the house of madame de Luxembourg, where I met with the comtesse de Boufflers.»

«Yes, I remember,» said I, «the former of these ladies was the particular friend of Jean Jacques Rousseau.»

«And the second also,» answered she; «and I can promise you, that neither the one or the other spoke too well of him.»

«Is it possible?» exclaimed I, with a warmth I could not repress.

«The duchess,» resumed madame de Mirepoix, «says he is an ill-bred and ungrateful man, and the countess insists upon it he is a downright pedant.»

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* Jean Jacques Rousseau in his journey through Lyons in June, 1770, subscribed for the statue of Voltaire.

« Shameful, indeed, » cried I; « but can you, my dear friend, account for the ill-nature with which these ladies speak of poor Rousseau? »

« Oh! yes, » replied the maréchale, « their motives are easily explained; and I will tell you a little secret, for the truth of which I can vouch. Madame de Luxembourg had at one time conceived the most lively passion for Jean Jacques. »

« Indeed! » cried I; « and he — »

« Did not return it. As for madame de Boufflers, the case was exactly reversed; and Rousseau has excited her resentment by daring long to nurse a hopeless flame, of which she was the object: this presumption on the part of the poet our dignified countess could never pardon However, I entreat of you not to repeat this; remember, I tell you in strictest secrecy. »

« Oh, be assured of my discretion, » said I; « I promise you not to publish your secret » (which, by the way, I was very certain was not communicated for the first time when told to me).

This confidence on the part of the maréchale had, in some unaccountable manner, only increased the ardent desire I felt to see the author of the « *Nouvelle Héloïse* »; and I observed to madame de Mirepoix, that I had a great curiosity to be introduced to Rousseau.

« I fear, » said she, « you will never be able to persuade him to visit at the château. »

« How then can I accomplish my desire of seeing this celebrated man? »

« By one simple method; if he will not come to you, you must go to him. I would willingly accompany you, but he knows me, and my presence would spoil all. The best thing you can do is to dress yourself quite plainly, as a lady from the country, taking with you one of your female attendants. You may take as a pretext for your visit some music you would wish to have copied. Be sure to treat M. de Rousseau as a mere copyist, and appear never to have heard of his superior merit: do this, and you will receive the best possible reception. »

I greatly approved of the maréchale's advice, which I assured her I would delay no longer than till the following day to put into practice; and, after some further conversation upon J. J. Rousseau, we parted.

Early the next day I set out for Paris accompanied by Henriette; there, in pursuance of the suggestion of madame de Mirepoix, I dressed myself as a person recently arrived from the country, and Henriette, who was to accompany me, disguised herself as a villager. I assure you, our personal attractions lost nothing by the change of our attire. From the rue de la Jussienne to the rue Platrière is only a few steps; nevertheless, in the fear of being recognised, I took a hired carriage. Having reached our place of destination, we entered, by a shabby door, the habitation of Jean Jacques Rousseau: his apartments were on the fifth floor. I can scarcely describe to you, my friend, the emotions I experienced as I drew nearer and nearer to the author of «Héloïse.» At each flight of stairs I was compelled to pause to collect my ideas, and my poor heart beat as though I had been keeping an assignation. At length, however, we reached the fifth story; thereafter having rested a few minutes to recover myself, I was about to knock at a door which was opposite to me, when, as I approached, I heard a sweet but tremulous voice singing a melancholy air, which I have never since heard anywhere; the same voice repeated the romance to which I was listening several times. When it had entirely ceased I profited by the silence to tap with my knuckles against the door, but so feeble was the signal, that even Henriette, who was close behind me, could not hear it. She begged I would permit her to ring a bell which hung near us; and, having done so, a step was heard approaching the door, and, in a minute or two, it was opened by a man of about sixty years of age, who, seeing two females, took off his cap with a sort of clumsy gallantry, at which I affected to be much flattered.

« Pray, sir,» said I, endeavouring to repress my emotion, « does a person named Rousseau, a copier of music, live here?»

« Yes, madam; I am he. What is your pleasure?»

"I have been told, sir, that you are particularly skilful in copying music cheaply; I should be glad if you would undertake to copy these airs I have brought with me."

"Have the goodness to walk in, madam."

We crossed a small obscure closet, which served as a species of antechamber and entered the sitting-room of M. de Rousseau, who seated me in an arm-chair, and motioning to Henriette to sit down, once more inquired my wishes respecting the music.

"Sir," said I, "as I live in the country, and but very rarely visit Paris, I should be obliged to you to get it done as early as possible."

"Willingly, madam; I have not much upon my hands just now."

I then gave to Jean Jacques Rousseau the roll of music I had brought. He begged I would continue seated, requested permission to keep on his cap, and went to a little table to examine the music I had brought.

Upon my first entrance I had perceived a close and confined smell in these miserable apartments, but, by degrees, I became accustomed to it, and began to examine the chamber in which I sat with as strict a scrutiny as though I had intended making an inventory of its contents. Three old elbow-chairs, some rickety stools, a writing-table, on which were two or three volumes of music, some dried plants laid on white-brown paper; beside the table stood an old spinet, and, close to the latter article of furniture, sat a fat and well-looking cat. Over the chimney hung an old silver watch; the walls of the room were adorned with about half a dozen views of Switzerland and some inferior engravings, two only, which occupied the most honourable situations, struck me; one represented Frederick II., and under the picture were written some lines (which I cannot now recollect) by Rousseau himself; the other engraving, which hung opposite, was the likeness of a very tall, thin, old man, whose dress was nearly concealed by the dirt which had been allowed to accumulate upon it; I could only distinguish that it was ornamented with a broad riband When I had sufficiently surveyed this chamber, the simplicity of which, so closely bordering on want and misery, pained me to the heart, I directed my attention to the extraordinary man who was the occasion of my visit. He was of middle height, slightly bent by age, with a large and expansive chest; his features were common in their cast, but possessed of the most perfect regularity. His eyes, which he from time to time raised from the music he was considering, were round and sparkling but small, and the heavy brows which hung over them, conveyed an idea of gloom and severity; but his mouth, which was certainly the most beautiful and fascinating in its expression I ever saw, soon removed this unfavourable impression. Altogether there belonged to his countenance a smile of mixed sweetness and sadness, which bestowed on it an indescribable charm.

To complete my description, I must not forget to add his dress, which consisted of a dirty cotton cap, to which were fixed strings of a riband that had once been scarlet; a pelisse with arm-holes, a flannel waistcoat, snuff-coloured breeches, gray stockings, and shoes slipped down at the heel, after the fashion of slippers. Such was the portrait, and such the abode of the man who believed himself to be one of the potentates of the earth and who, in fact, had once owned his little court and train of courtiers; for, in the century in which he lived, talent had become as arbitrary as sovereign power—thanks to the stupidity of some of our grandees and the caprice of Frederick of Prussia.

Meanwhile my host, undisturbed by my reflections, had quietly gone over his packet of music. He found amongst it an air from "*Le Devin du Village*," which I had purposely placed there; he half turned towards me, and looking steadfastly at me, as if he would force the truth from my lips.

"Madam," said he, "do you know the author of this little composition?"

"Yes," replied I, with an air of as great simplicity as I could assume, "it is written by a person of the same name as yourself, who writes books and composes operas. Is he any relation to you?"

My answer and question disarmed the suspicions of Jean Jacques, who was about to reply, but stopped himself, as if afraid of uttering a falsehood, and contented himself with smiling and casting down his eyes. Taking courage from his silence, I ventured to add,— « The M. de Rousseau who composed this pretty air has written much beautiful music and many very clever works. Should I ever know the happiness of becoming a mother I shall owe to him the proper care and education of my child.» Rousseau made no reply, but he turned his eyes towards me, and at this moment the expression of his countenance was perfectly celestial, and I could readily imagine how easily he might have inspired a warmer sentiment than that of admiration.

Whilst we were conversing in this manner, a female, between the age of forty and fifty, entered the room. She saluted me with great affectation of politeness, and then, without speaking to Rousseau, went and seated herself familiarly upon a chair on the other side of the table: this was Thérèse, a sort of factotum, who served the master of these apartments both as servant and mistress. I could not help regarding this woman with a feeling of disgust; she had a horrible cough, which she told us was more than usually troublesome on that day. I had heard of her avarice; therefore to prevent the appearance of having called upon an unprofitable errand, I inquired of Jean Jacques Rousseau how much the music would cost.

« Six sous a page, madam,» replied he, « is the usual price.»

« Shall I, sir,» asked I, « leave you any cash in hand for the purchase of what paper you will require?»

« No, I thank you, madam,» replied Rousseau, smiling; « thank God! I am not yet so far reduced that I cannot purchase it for you. I have a trifling annuity —»

« And you would be a much richer man,» screamed Thérèse, « if you would insist upon those people at the opera paying you what they owe you.» These words were accompanied with a shrug of the shoulders, intended to convey a vast idea of her own opinion.

Rousseau made no reply; indeed he appeared to me like a frightened child in the presence of its nurse; and I could quickly see, that from the moment of her entering the room he had become restless and dejected, he fidgeted on his seat, and seemed like a person in excessive pain. At length he rose, and requesting my pardon for absenting himself, he added, « My wife will have the honour to entertain you whilst I am away.» With these words he opened a small glass-door, and disappeared in the neighbouring room.

When we were alone with Thérèse, she lost no time in opening the conversation.

« Madam,» cried she, « I trust you will have the goodness to excuse M. Rousseau; he is very unwell; it is really extremely vexatious.»

I replied that M. Rousseau had made his own excuses. Just then Thérèse, wishing to give herself the appearance of great utility, cried out,

« Am I wanted there, M. Rousseau ?»

« No, no, no,» replied Jean Jacques, in a faint voice, which died away as if at a distance.

He soon after re-entered the room.

« Madam,» said he, « have the kindness to place your music in other hands to copy; I am truly concerned that I cannot execute your wishes, but I feel too ill to set about it directly.»

I replied, that I was in no hurry; that I should be in Paris some time yet, and that he might copy it at his leisure. It was then settled that it should be ready within a week from that time; upon which I rose, and ceremoniously saluting Thérèse, was conducted to the door by M. Rousseau, whose politeness led him to escort me thither, holding his cap in his hand. I retired, filled with admiration, respect, and pity.

When next I saw the duc d'Aiguillon, I could not refrain from relating to him all that had happened. My recital inspired him with the most lively curiosity to see Rousseau, whom he had never met in society. It was then agreed, that when I went to fetch my music he should accompany me, disguised in a similar manner to myself, and that I should pass him off as my uncle. At the end of the eight days I repaired early as before to Paris; the duke was not long in joining me there. He was so inimitably well disguised, that no person would ever have detected the most elegant nobleman of the court of France beneath the garb of a plain country squire. We set out laughing like simpletons at the easy air with which he wore his new costume; nevertheless our gaiety disappeared as we reached the habitation of J. J. Rousseau. Spite of ourselves we were compelled to honour and respect the man of talent and genius, who preferred independence of ideas to riches, and before whom rank and power were compelled to lay aside their unmeaning trappings ere they could reach his presence. When we reached the fifth landing-place I rang, and this time the door was opened by Thérèse, who told us M. Rousseau was out.

« But, madam, » answered I, « I am here by the direction of your husband to fetch away the music he has been engaged in copying for me. »

« Ah, madam, » exclaimed she, « is it you? I did not recollect you again; pray walk in. M. Rousseau will be sure to be at home for you. »

« So, then, » thought I, « even genius has its visiting lists. » We entered; Jean Jacques formally saluted us, and invited us to be seated. He then gave me my music; I inquired what it came to; he consulted a little memorandum which lay upon the table, and replied, « So many pages, so much paper, eighteen livres twelve sous; » which, of course, I instantly paid. The duc d'Aiguillon, whom I styled my uncle, was endeavoring to lead Rousseau into conversation, when the outer bell rung. Thérèse went to open the door, and a gentleman entered, of mature age, although still preserving his good looks. The duke regarded him in silence and immediately made signs for me to hasten our departure; I obeyed, and took leave of Rousseau, with many thanks for his punctuality. He accompanied us as before to the door, and there I quitted him never to see him more. As we were descending the staircase, M. d'Aiguillon told me that the person who had so hastened our departure was Duclas, and that his hurry to quit Rousseau arose from his dread of being recognised by him. Although M. Duclas was a very excellent man, I must own that I owed no small grudge for a visit which had thus abridged ours.

In the evening the duc d'Aiguillon and myself related to the king our morning's pilgrimage. I likewise recounted my former visit, which I had concealed until now. Louis XV. seemed greatly interested with the recital of it; he asked me a thousand questions, and would fain hear the most trifling particulars.

« I shall never forget,» said Louis XV., «the amazing success obtained by his '*Devin du Village*.'» There certainly were some beautiful airs, and the king began to hum over the song of

«*J'ai perdu tout mon bonheur.*»

«Yes, madam,» continued his majesty, «I promise you, that had Rousseau after his success chosen to step forward as a candidate for public favour, he would soon have overthrown Voltaire.»

«Pardon me,» replied I; «but I cannot believe that would have been possible under any circumstances.»

«And why not?» asked the king; «he was a man of great talent.»

«Doubtless, sire, but not of the kind to compete with Voltaire.»

The king then changed the conversation to Thérèse, inquiring whether she possessed any attractions?

«None whatever, sire,» replied the duke; «at least none that we could perceive.»

«In that case,» rejoined his majesty, «she must have charmed her master by some of those unseen perfections which take the deepest hold of the heart; besides I know not why we should think it strange that others see with different eyes to ourselves.»

I made no secret with the comte Jean of my visit, and he likewise expressed his desire to know a man so justly celebrated, and, in its proper place, you may hear how he managed to effect this, and what befell him in consequence — but, to finish for the present with Rousseau, for I will not promise that I shall not again indulge in speaking of him. I will just say, that after the lapse of two or three days from the time of my last visit, the idea occurred to me of sending him a thousand crowns in an Indian casket. This I sent by a servant out of livery, whom I strictly enjoined not to name me but to say simply that he came from a lady. He brought back the casket to me unopened, and the following billet from Rousseau: —

> "Madam, — I send back the present you would force upon my acceptance in so concealed a manner; if it be offered as a testimony of your esteem I may possibly accept it, when you permit me to know the hand from which it comes. Be assured, madam, that there is much truth in the assertion of its being more easy to give than to receive.
>
> "I have the honour to remain, madam, yours, etc., etc.,
>
> "J. J. Rousseau."

This was rather an uncouth manner of refusing; nevertheless, when at this distance of time I review the transaction, I cannot help admitting that I well deserved it. Perhaps when it first occurred I might have felt piqued, but since I have quitted the court I have again read over the works of J. J. Rousseau, and I now speak of him, as you see, without one particle of resentment.

I must now speak to you of a new acquaintance I made about this period — that of the two duchesses d'Aiguillon. From my first entrance into the château until the close of 1770, madame d'Aiguillon, the daughter-in-law, observed a sort of armed neutrality towards me; true, she never visited me, but she always met me with apparent satisfaction at the houses of others; thus she managed to steer clear of one dangerous extreme or the other till the downfall of the des Choiseuls; when the duc d'Aiguillon having been nominated to the ministry, she perceived that she could not, without great ingratitude, omit calling to offer me her acknowledgments, and accordingly she came. On my side, I left no means untried of rendering myself agreeable to her; and so well did

I succeed, that from that moment her valuable friendship was bestowed on me with a sincerity which even my unfortunate reverses have been unable to shake; and we are to this day the same firm and true friends we were in the zenith of my power. Not that I would seek to justify the injury she sought to do our queen, but I may and do congratulate myself, that the same warmth which pervades her hatreds likewise influences her friendships.

I cannot equally boast of the treatment I received from the duchess dowager d'Aiguillon, who, as well as her daughter-in-law, came to see me upon the promotion of her son. She overloaded me with caresses, and even exceeded her daughter-in-law in protestations of devotion and gratitude. You should have heard her extol my beauty, wit, and sweetness of disposition; she, in fact, so overwhelmed me with her surfeiting praises, that at last I became convinced that, of the thousand flattering things she continually addressed to me, not one was her candid opinion; and I was right, for I soon learned, that in her circle of intimates at the houses of the Beauffremons, the Brionnes, and above all, the marquise du Deffant, she justified her acquaintance with me, by saying it was a sacrifice made to the interests of her son, and amused these ladies by censuring my every word and look. The dowager's double-dealing greatly annoyed me; nevertheless, not wishing to vex her son, or her daughter-in-law, I affected to be ignorant of her dishonourable conduct. However, I could not long repress my indignation, and one day that she was praising me most extravagantly, I exclaimed, « Ah, madam, how kind it would be of you to reserve one of these pretty speeches to repeat at madame du Deffant's.» This blow, so strong yet just, rather surprised her; but, quickly rallying her courage, she endeavoured to persuade me that she always spoke of me in the same terms. « It may be so,» replied I; « but I fear that you say so many flattering things to me, that you have not one left when out of my sight.»

The maréchale de Mirepoix used to say, that a caress from madame d'Aiguillon was not less to be dreaded than the bite of M. d'Ayen. Yet the duchess dowager has obtained a first-rate reputation for goodness; every one styled her *the good duchesse d'Aiguillon.* And why, do you suppose? Because she was one of those fat, fresh, portly-looking dames of whom you would have said, her very face and figure bespoke the contented goodness of her disposition; for who would ever suspect malice could lurk in so much *embonpoint?* I think I have already told you that this lady expired whilst bathing, of an attack of apoplexy, in the month of June, 1772. Her son shed many tears at her loss, whilst I experienced but a very moderate share of grief.

Adieu, my friend; if you are not already terrified at the multiplicity of the letters which compose my journal, I have yet much to say; and I flatter myself the continuance of my adventures will be found no less interesting than those you have perused.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The king's friends — The duc de Fronsac — The duc d'Ayen's remark — Manner of living at court — The marquis de Dreux — Brézé — Education of Louis XV. — The *Parc-aux-Cerfs* — Its household — Its inmates — Mère Bompart — Livres expended on the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* — Good advice — Madame.

I WAS now firmly fixed at court, the king, more than ever devoted to me, seemed unable to dispense with my constant presence. I had so successfully studied his habits and peculiarities, that my empire over him was established on a basis too firm to be shaken, whilst my power and unbounded influence convinced my enemies, that, so long as the present monarch sat upon the throne of France, their attempts at diminishing my credit and influence would only recoil upon themselves. Louis XV. generally supped in my apartments every evening, unless indeed, by way of change, I went to sup with him. Our guests were of course of the first order, but yet not of the most exemplary morals. These persons had tact, and saw that, to please the king, they must not surpass him; so that, if by chance he should reflect on himself, he would appear to advantage amongst them. Poor courtiers! It was labour in vain. The king was in too much fear of knowing himself to understand that study: he knew the penetration and severity of his own judgment, and on no account would he exercise it at his own expense.

The duc de Duras, although a man of little wit, was yet gay and always lively. He amused me; I liked his buoyant disposition, and forgave him although he had ranged himself with the protesting peers. In fact, I could not be angry with him. The folly of opposition had only seized on him because it was epidemic. The dear duke had found himself with wolves, and had begun to howl with them. I am sure that he was astonished at himself when he remembered the signature which he had given, and the love he had testified for the old parliament, for which, in fact, he cared no more than Jean de Vert. God knows how he compensated for this little folly at the château. It was by redoubling his assiduities to the king, and by incessant attentions to me. In general, those who wished to thrive at court only sought how to make their courage remembered; M. de Duras was only employed in making his forgotten.

The prince de Terigny, the comte d'Escars, the duc de Fleury, were not the least amusing. They kept up a lively strain of conversation, and the king laughed outrageously. But the vilest of the party was the duc de Fronsac. Ye gods! what a wretch! To speak ill of him is no sin. A mangled likeness of his father, he had all his faults with not one of his merits. He was perpetually changing his mistresses, but it cannot be said whether it was inconstancy on his part, or disgust on theirs, but the latter appears to me most probable. Though young, he was devoured by gout or some other infirmity, but it was called gout out of deference to the house of Richelieu. They talked of the duchess de ——, whose husband was said to have poisoned her.

The saints of Versailles — the duc de la Vauguyon, the duc d'Estissac, and M. de Durfort — did like others. These persons practised religion in the face of the world, and abstained from loose conversation in presence of their own families; but with the king they laid aside their religion and reserve, so that these hypocrites had in the city all the honours of devotion, and in the royal apartments all the advantages of loose conduct. As for me, I was at Versailles the same as everywhere else. To please the king I had only to be myself. I relied, for the future, on my uniformity of conduct. What charmed him in the evening, would delight again the next day. He had an equilibrium of pleasure, a balance of amusement which can hardly be described; it was every day the same variety; the same journeys, the same fêtes, the balls, the theatres, all came round at fixed periods, with the most monotonous regularity. In fact, the people knew exactly when to laugh and when to look grave.

There was in the château a most singular character, the grand master of the ceremonies of France. His great-grandfather, his grandfather, his father, who had fulfilled these functions for a century, had transmitted to him their understanding and their duties. All he thought of was how to regulate the motions and steps of every person at court. He adored the dauphin and dauphiness, because they both diverted and fatigued themselves according to the rules in such cases made and provided. He was always preaching to me and quoted against me the precedents of Diane de Poitiers, or Gabrielle d'Estrées. One day he told me that all the misfortunes of mademoiselle de la Vallière occurred in consequence of her neglect of etiquette. He would have had all matters pass at court during the old age of Louis XV. as at the period of the childhood of Louis XIV., and would fain have had the administration of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, that he might have arranged all with due ceremonies.

Since this word *Parc-aux-Cerfs* has escaped my pen, I will tell you something of it. Do you know, my friend, that but little is known of this place, of which so much has been said. I can tell you, better than any other person, what it really was, for I, like the marquise de Pompadour took upon myself the superintendence of it, and busied myself with what they did there. It was, *entre nous*, the black spot in the reign of Louis XV., and will cost me much pain to describe.

The vices of Louis XV. were the result of bad education. When an infant, they gave him for governor the vainest, most coxcombical, stupidest of men — the duc de Villeroi, who had so well served the king (*si bien servi le roi*).*

Never had courtier so much courtiership as he. He saw the young prince from morning till night, and from morning till night he was incessantly repeating in his ears that his future subjects were born for him, and that they were all dependent on his good and gracious pleasure. Such lessons daily repeated, necessarily destroyed the wise instructions of Massillon. When grown up, Louis XV. saw the libertinism of cardinal Dubois and the orgies of the regency: madame de Maillis' shameless conduct was before his eyes and Richelieu's also. Louis XV. could not conduct himself differently from his ministers and his family. His timid character was formed upon the example of others. At first he selected his own mistresses, but afterwards he chose some one who took that trouble off his hands. Lebel became purveyor in chief to his pleasures; and controlled in Versailles the house known as the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*.

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* The countess alludes to the *chanson* written, after his famous defeat, « *Villeroi, Villeroi a fort bien servi le roi.* »

As soon as the courtiers knew of the existence and purposes of this house, they intrigued for the control of it. The king laughed at all their efforts, and left the whole management to Lebel, under the superintendence of the comte de Saint-Florentin, minister of the royal household. They installed there, however, a sort of military chief, formerly a major of infantry, who was called, jestingly, M. de Cervières; his functions consisted in an active surveillance, and in preventing young men from penetrating the seraglio. The soldiers at the nearest station had orders to obey his first summons. His pay was twelve thousand livres a year.

A female styled the *surintendante* had the management of the domestic affairs; she ruled with despotic sway; controlled the expenses; preserved good order; and regulated the amusement of her charges, taking care that they did not mix one with the other. She was an elderly canoness of a noble order, belonging to one of the best families in Burgundy. She was only known at the Parc as *Madame*, and no one ventured to give her any other title. Shortly after the decease of Mme. de Pompadour, she had succeeded in this employ a woman of low rank, who had a most astonishing mind. Louis XV. thought very highly of her, and said that if she were a man he would have made her his minister. She had put the harem on an admirable system, and instructed the *odalisques* in all the necessary etiquette.

The Madame of my time was a woman of noble appearance, tall, ascetic, with a keen eye and imperious manner. She expressed a sovereign contempt for all the low-born beauties confided to her trust. However, she did not treat her wards ill, for some one of them might produce a passion in the heart of the king, and she was determined to be prepared for whatever might fall out. As to the noble ladies, they were her favourites. Madame did not divide her flock into fair and dark, which would have been natural, but into noble and ignoble.

Besides Madame, there were two under-mistresses, whose duties consisted in keeping company with the young ladies who were placed there. They sometimes dined with new comers, instructed them in polite behaviour, and aided them in their musical lessons, or in dancing, history, and literature in which these *élèves* were instructed. Then followed a dozen women of lower station, creatures for any service, half waiting women, half companions, who kept watch over the young ladies, and neglected nothing that could injure each other at every opportunity. The work of the house was performed by proper servants and male domestics, chosen expressly for their age and ugliness. They were paid high, but in return for the least indiscretion on their part, they were sent to linger out their existence in a state prison. A severe watch was kept over every person of either sex in this mysterious establishment. It was requisite, in fact, that an impenetrable veil should be cast over the frailties of the king; and that the public should know nothing of what occurred at the *Parc-aux-Cerfs.*

The general term *élèves* was applied to the young persons who were kept there. They were of all ages from nine to eighteen years. Until fifteen they were kept in total ignorance of the city which they inhabited. When they attained that age, no more mystery was made of it; they only endeavoured to prevent them from believing that they were destined for the king's service. Sometimes they were told that they were imprisoned as well as their family; sometimes, a lover rich and powerful kept them concealed to satisfy his love. One thought she belonged to a German prince, another to an English lord. There were some, however, who, better informed, either by their predecessors, or by chance, knew precisely what was in store for them, and accordingly built some exceedingly fine castles in the air. But when they were suspected to be so knowing, they were sent away, and either married (if pregnant), or compelled to enter a cloister or chapter.

The noble damsels were served with peculiar etiquette, their servants wore a green livery. Those who belonged to the ignobles, had their valets clothed only in gray. The king had arranged this, and applauded it as one of the most admirable decisions of his life, and contended with me that the families who paid this impost for his pleasures, were greatly indebted to him for it. I assure you, my friend, that there are often very peculiar ideas in the head of a king.

After *madame*, the *sous-madames*, the young ladies, came a lady, who had no title in the house, because she "carried on the war" out of doors, but still was a most useful personage. In very truth la mère Bompart was a wonderful animal. Paint to yourself a woman rather small than large, rather fat than lean, rather old than young, with a good foot, a good eye, as robust as a trooper, with a decided "call" for intrigue, drinking nothing but wine, telling nothing but lies, swearing by, or denying God, as suited her purpose. Fancy such an one, and you will have before you *la mère Bompart, pourvoyeuse en chef des celludes du Parc-aux-Cerfs.*

She was in correspondence with all sorts of persons, with the most celebrated *appareilleuses*, and of course with the most noted pimps. She treated Lebel as her equal, went familiarly to M. de Sartines, and occasionally condescended to visit M. de Saint-Florentin. Everybody at court received her graciously; everybody but the king and myself, who held her in equal horror.

The *Parc-aux-Cerfs* cost enormous sums. The lowest expense was calculated at 150,000 livres, to pay only the functionaries and the domestics, the education and the board of the *élèves*, etc. This does not include the cost of the *recruiting service*, the indemnities paid to families, the dowry given with them in marriage, the presents made to them, and the expenses of the illegitimate children: this was enormous in cost, at least 2,000,000 livres a year, and yet I make the lowest estimation. The *Parc-aux-Cerfs* was kept up for thirty-four years: it cost annually 4 or 5,000,000 livres, and that will amount to nearly 150,000,000 (£ 6,250,000). If you think I mistake, go through the calculation.

A short time after my sojourn at Versailles, when I was the acknowledged mistress of the king, the duc de Richelieu asked me if I had heard of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs?* I asked him, in my turn, what he meant, and if I could procure any account of the place. He then told me of the care which madame de Pompadour bestowed on the place, the advantage she drew from it, and assured me of the necessity for following her example. I spoke of this to comte Jean, and begged his advice. My brother-in-law replied: —

"You must do as the marquise de Pompadour did, and as the duc de Richelieu has advised. They spend a vast deal of money in this house, and I undertake to look over their accounts. Nominate me your prime minister, and I shall be the happiest of men. It is impossible but there must be something to be gleaned from his majesty."

"In truth, my dear brother-in-law, you would be in your element; money to handle and young girls to manage. What more could you covet? You will establish a gaming table at the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, and never quit it again."

Comte Jean began to laugh, and then seriously advised me to follow the plain counsel of the duc de Richelieu.

I decided on doing so. I sent for Madame. She came with all the dignity of an abbess of a regally founded convent. But in spite of her pretensions, I only saw in her the rival of Gourdan and Pâris, and treated her as such; that is, with some contempt, for with that feeling her office inspired me. She told me all I have described to you, and many other things which have since escaped me. At that time there were only four *élèves* in the house. When she had given me all the details I wished, I sent her away, desiring to be informed of all that passed in her establishment.

CHAPTER XXX.

Fête given by the comtesse de Valentinois — The comtesse du Barry feigns an indisposition — Her dress — The duc de Cossé — The comte and comtesse de Provence — Dramatic entertainment — Favart and Voisenon — A few observations — A pension — The maréchale de Luxembourg — Adventure of M. de Bombelles — Copy of a letter addressed to him — Louis XV. — M. de Maupeou and madame du Barry.

MY PRESENT situation was not a little embarrassing; known and recognised as the mistress of the king, it but ill accorded with my feelings to be compelled to add to that title the superintendent of his pleasures; and I had not yet been sufficiently initiated into the intrigues of a court life to accept this strange charge without manifest dislike and hesitation. Nevertheless, whilst so many were contending for the honour of that which I condemned, I was compelled to stifle my feelings and resign myself to the bad as well as the good afforded by my present situation; at a future period I shall have occasion again to revert to the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* during the period of my reign, but for the present I wish to change the subject by relating to you what befell me at a fête given me by madame de Valentinois, while she feigned to give it in the honour of madame de Provence.

The comtesse de Valentinois, flattered by the kindness of the dauphiness's manner towards her, and wishing still further to insinuate herself into her favour, imagined she should promote her object by requesting that princess would do her the honour to pass an evening at her house; her request was granted, and that too before the duchesse de la Vauguyon could interfere to prevent it. Furious at not having been apprized of the invitation till too late to cause its rejection, she vowed to make the triumphant countess pay dearly for her triumph; for my own part I troubled myself very little with the success of madame de Valentinois, which, in fact, I perceived would rather assist than interfere with my projects. Hitherto I had not made my appearance at any of the houses of the nobility when the princesses were invited thither; this clearly proved to the public, in general, how great was the opposition I experienced from the court party. I was now delighted to prove to the Parisians that I was not always to lead the life of a recluse, but that I could freely present myself at those parties to which other ladies were invited. However, as my friends apprehended that the comtesse de Provence might prevail upon her lady of honour not to invite me, by the advice of the chancellor and the minister for foreign affairs, it was arranged that I should for a week previous to the fête feign a severe indisposition. It would be impossible to describe the joy with which these false tidings were received by my enemies. We are all apt to picture things as we would have them, and already the eager imaginations of the opposing party had converted the account of my illness into an incurable and mortal disease. Every hour my friends brought me in fresh anecdotes of the avidity with which the rumour of my dangerous state had been received, whilst I lay upon what the credulous hopes of my enemies had determined to be my death-bed, laughing heartily at their folly, and preparing fresh schemes to confound and disappoint their anticipated triumph.

One very important object of consideration was my dress for the coming occasion. The king presented me with a new set of jewels, and himself selected the materials for my robe and train, which were to be composed of a rich green satin embroidered with gold, trimmed with wreaths of roses, and looped up with pearls; the lower part of this magnificent dress was trimmed with a profusion of the finest Flemish lace. I wore on my head a garland of full blown roses, composed of the finest green and gold work; round my forehead was a string of beautiful pearls, from the centre of which depended a diamond star; add to this a pair of splendid ear-rings, valued at 100,000 crowns, with a variety of jewels equally costly, and you may form some idea of my appearance on that eventful evening. The king, who presided at my toilette, could not repress his admiration; he even insisted upon clasping my necklace, in order that he might, as he said, flatter himself with having completed such a triumph of nature and art.

At the hour fixed upon I set out, conducted by the ducs d'Aiguillon and de Cossé; and now I remember I have introduced this latter to you for the first time, however I will promise that it will not be for the last; he possessed, and still possesses all the virtues of his noble house, he was impetuous from a deeply feeling heart, and proud from a consciousness of being properly appreciated. Young, handsome, and daring, he was preeminently calculated both to inspire love, and to feel it; it was quite impossible for him to fail in winning the affections of any female he exerted himself to please, and even at the present time that he has lost some of his earlier graces, he is still irresistible as ever; his naturally gay disposition was but ill suited to nourishing grave or philosophic reasoning, but then he was the soul of company, and possessed a fine and delicate wit which ever vented itself in the most brilliant sallies. M. de Cossé, like the knights of old, was wholly devoted to his king and his mistress, and would, I am sure, had occasion required it, have nobly died in defence of either; I only pray he may never be put to the proof. I saw much of him at the beginning of our acquaintance, but as his many amiable qualities became better known, I found myself almost continually in his society, indeed as I have something to confess in the business, I could hardly choose a better opportunity than the present, did I not recollect that the good duc d'Aiguillon is waiting all this while for me to announce the *entrée* of our party into the anteroom of Madame de Valentinois.

My entrance was a complete *coup-de-théâtre.* I had been imagined languishing on the bed of sickness, yet there I stood in all the fulness of health and freshness of beauty. I could very easily read upon each countenance the vexation and rage my appearance of entire freedom from all ailment excited; however, I proceeded without any delay to the mistress of the house, whom I found busily engaged in seating her visitors, and playing the amiable to the dauphiness. This princess seemed equally astonished at my unexpected apparition; nevertheless, taken off her guard, she could not prevent herself from courteously returning the profound salutation I made her. As for the duchesse de la Vauguyon, when she saw me, she turned alternately from red to white, and was even weak enough to give public vent to her fury. The comte de Provence, who had been told that I was not expected, began to laugh when he perceived me, and taking the first opportunity of approaching me, he said, « Ah, madame! so you too can mystify your friends, I see! Have a care; the sight of charms like yours is sufficient to strike terror into any adversaries, without having recourse to any expedient to heighten their effect.» Saying this he passed on without giving me the opportunity of replying, as I could have wished to have done.

The maréchale de Mirepoix, to whom I had confided my secret, and of whose fidelity I was assured, was present at the fête. I availed myself of the offer of a seat near her and directly we were seated, « You are a clever creature,» said she, « for you have completely bewildered all the female part of this evening's society, and by way of a finishing stroke will run away with the hearts of all the flutterers here, before the fair ladies they were previously hovering around, have recovered their first astonishment.»

« Upon my word,» said I, smiling, « I do not wonder at the kind looks with which the ladies favour me, if my presence is capable of producing so much mischief.»

« Pray, my dear,» answered the maréchale, « be under no mistake; you might be as much beloved as others are, if you did not monopolize the king's affections; the consequence is, that every woman with even a passable face looks upon you as the usurper of her right, and as the fickle gentlemen who woo these gentle ladies are all ready to transfer their homage to you directly you appear, you must admit that your presence is calculated to produce no inconsiderable degree of confusion."

The commencement of a play which formed part of the evening's entertainment obliged us to cease further conversation.

The first piece represented was "*Rose et Colas*," a charming pastoral, to which the music of Monsigny gave a fresh charm; the actors were selected from among the best of the Comédie Italienne — the divine Clairval, and the fascinating mademoiselle Caroline. I was completely enchanted whilst the play lasted; I forgot both my cabals and recent triumph, and for a while believed myself actually transported to the rural scenes it represented, surrounded by the honest villagers so well depicted; but this delightful vision soon passed away, and soon, too soon I awoke from it to find myself surrounded by my *excellent* friends at court.

"*Rose et Colas*" was followed by a species of comedy mixed with songs. This piece was wholly in honour of the dauphiness, with the exception of some flattering and gallant allusions to myself and some gross compliments to my cousin the chancellor, who, in new silk robe and a fine powdered wig, was also present at this fête.

The performers in this little piece, who were Favart, the actor, and Voisenon, the priest, must have been fully satisfied with the reception they obtained, for the comedy was applauded as though it had been one of the *chefs d'oeuvre* of Voltaire. In general a private audience is very indulgent so long as the representation lasts, but no sooner has the curtain fallen than they indulge in a greater severity of criticism than a public audience would do. And so it happened on the evening in question; one couplet had particularly excited the discontent of the spectators, male and female; I know not what prophetic spirit inspired the lines.

The unfortunate couplet was productive of much offence against the husband and lover of madame Favart, for the greater part of the persons present perfectly detested my poor cousin, who was « to clip the wings of chicanery. » Favart managed to escape just in time, and the abbé de Voisenon, who was already not in very high favour with his judges, was compelled to endure the full weight of their complaints and reproaches; every voice was against him, and even his brethren of the French academy, departing from their accustomed indulgence upon such matters, openly reprimanded him for the grossness of his flattery; the poor abbé attempted to justify himself by protesting that he knew nothing of the hateful couplet, and that Favart alone was the guilty person upon whom they should expend their anger.

« I am always, » cried he, « doomed to suffer for the offences of others; every kind of folly is made a present to me. »

« Have a care, monsieur l'abbé, » exclaimed d'Alembert, who was among the guests, « have a care! men seldom lavish their gifts but upon those who are rich enough to return the original present in a tenfold degree. » This somewhat sarcastic remark was most favourably received by all who heard it, it quickly circulated through the room, while the poor, oppressed abbé protested, with vehement action.

The fête itself was most splendidly and tastefully conducted, and might have sent the different visitors home pleased and gratified in an eminent degree, had not spite and ill-nature suggested to madame de la Vauguyon, that as the chancellor and myself were present, it must necessarily have been given with a view of complimenting us rather than madame de Provence. She even sought to irritate the dauphiness by insinuating the same mean and contemptible observations, and so far did she succeed, that when madame de Valentinois approached to express her hopes that the entertainment which she had honoured with her presence had been to her royal highness's satisfaction, the dauphiness coolly replied, « Do not, madame, affect to style this evening's fête one bestowed in honour of myself, or any part of my family; 'tis true we have been the ostensible causes, and have, by our presence, given it all the effect you

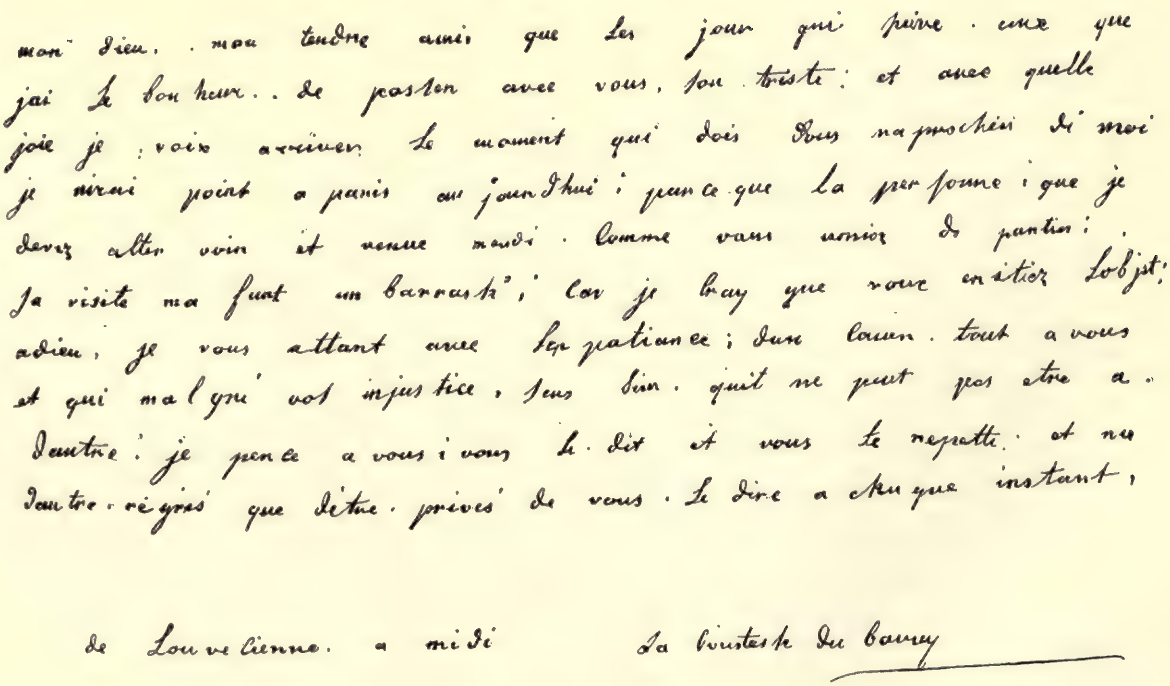
TRANSLATION

Heavens! my dear friend, how sad are the days when I am deprived of the happiness of passing the time with you, and with what joy do I watch for the moment which will bring you to me. I shall not go to Paris to-day, because the person I was going to see is coming Thursday. As you will be going away, I shall visit the barracks instead, for I believe you approve of the object. Adieu. I await you with impatience, with a heart wholly yours, which, in spite of your injustice, could never belong to any other, even if I had the wish. I think of you and that word of yours which you will surely regret; and still another regret is that I am deprived of you. That is the watchword of each instant.

THE COUNTESS DU BARRY.

At Louvecienne, Noon.

FACSIMILE OF LETTER FROM MME. DU BARRY
TO THE DUC DE BRISSAC.



mon dieu, . mon tendre amis que les jour qui paisse . ceux que
jai le bonheur . . de passer avec vous, son triste : et avec quelle
joie je ; voix arriver le moment qui dois vous rapprocher de moi
je nirai point a paris aujourdhui ; parce que la personne ; que je
devez aller voir et venue mardi . Comme vous aviez du partir : .
sa visite ma fait un barrassé ; Car je sçay que vous en étiez lobjet ;
adieu, je vous attant avec lexpatiance ; dun couer . tout a vous
et qui malgré vos injustice , sent bien . quil ne peut pas etre a .
dautre ; je pence a vous ; vous le dit et vous le repetti . et na
dautre . regrès que dètre . privée de vous . le dire a chaque instant ,

de Louvecienne . a midi — la Comtesse du Barry

desired, but you will pardon our omitting to thank you for an attention, which was in reality, directed to the comtesse du Barry and M. de Maupeou."

Madame de Valentinois came to me with tears in her eyes to repeat the cruel remark of the princess; the maréchale de Mirepoix, who heard her, sought to console her by assurances, that it would in no degree affect her interest at court. "Never mind, my good friend," said she; "the pretty bird merely warbles the notes it learns from its keeper la Vauguyon, and will as quickly forget as learn them. Nevertheless, the king owes you a recompense for the vexation it has occasioned you."

Immediately that I found myself alone with the maréchale, I inquired of her what was the nature of the reparation she considered madame de Valentinois entitled to expect from the hands of his majesty. She replied, "'Tis on your account alone that the poor countess has received her late mortification; the king is therefore bound to atone for it in the form of a pension. Money, my dear, money is a sovereign cure at court; calms every grief and heals every wound."

I fully agreed with the good-natured maréchale; and, when I bade the sorrowful madame de Valentinois good night, I assured her I would implore his majesty to repair the mischief my presence had caused. Accordingly on the following day, when the king questioned me as to how far I had been amused with the fête given by madame de Valentinois, I availed myself of the opening to state my entire satisfaction, as well as to relate the disgrace into which she had fallen, and to pray his majesty to bestow upon her a pension of 15,000 livres.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Louis XV., hastily traversing the chamber, "this fête seems likely to prove a costly one to me."

"Nay, sire," said I, "it was a most delightful evening; and you will not, I hope, refuse me such a trifle for those who lavished so much for my amusement."

"Well," cried he, "be it so; the countess shall have the sum she requires, but upon condition that she does not apply to me again."

"Really your majesty talks," replied I, "as though this trifling pension were to be drawn from your own purse."

The king began to smile at my remark, like a man who knows himself found out. I knew him well enough to be certain that, had he intended the pension awarded madame de Valentinois to come from his own privy purse, he would scarcely have consented to bestowing on her more than a shabby pittance of a thousand livres per annum. It is scarcely possible to conceive an idea of the excessive economy of this prince. I remember, that upon some great occasion, when it was requisite to support the public treasury, which was failing, by a timely contribution, the duc de Choiseul offered the loan of 250,000 livres, whilst the king, to the astonishment of all who heard him, confined his aid to 2,000 louis! The maréchale de Mirepoix used to assert that Louis XV. was the only prince of his line who ever knew the value of a crown. She had, nevertheless, managed to receive plenty from him, although, I must own, that she had had no small difficulty in obtaining them; nor did the king part with his beloved gold without many a sigh of regret.

At the house of madame de Valentinois I met the maréchale de Luxembourg, who had recently returned from Chanteloup. There really was something of infatuation in the general mania which seemed to prevail of treating the king's sentiments with indifference, and considering his displeasure as an affair of no consequence. Before the disgrace of the Choiseuls they were equally the objects of madame de Luxembourg's most bitter hatred, nor was madame de Grammont backward in returning her animosity; yet, strange as it may seem, no sooner was the Choiseul party exiled, than the maréchale never rested till she saw her name engraved on the famous pillar erected to perpetuate the remembrance of all those who had visited the exiles. She employed their mutual friends to effect a reconciliation, which was at length effected by letter, and a friendly embrace exchanged by proxy. These preliminaries over, the maréchale came to the king to make the request to which he had now become accustomed, but which did not the less amuse him. Of course Louis XV. made no hesitation in granting her the request she solicited. Speaking to me of the subject, he said, « The *tender* meeting of madame de Grammont and the maréchale de Luxembourg must indeed be an overpowering sight; I only trust these two ladies may not drop the mask too soon, and bite each other's ear while they are embracing. »

Madame de Luxembourg, daughter of the duc de Villeroi, had been first married to the duc de Boufflers, whose brows she helped to adorn with other ornaments than the ducal coronet; nor whilst her youth and beauty lasted was she less generous to her second husband: she was generally considered a most fascinating woman, from the loveliness of her person and the vivacity of her manners; but behind an ever ready wit, lurked the most implacable malice and hatred against all who crossed her path or purpose. As she advanced in life she became more guarded and circumspect, until at last she set herself up as the arbitress of high life, and the youthful part of the nobility crowded around her, to hear the lessons of her past experience. By the number and by the power of her pupils, she could command both the court and city; her censures were dreaded, because pronounced in language so strong and severe, as to fill those who incurred them with no hope of ever shining in public opinion whilst so formidable a *veto* was uttered against them; and her decrees, from which there was no appeal, either stamped a man with dishonour, or introduced him as a first-rate candidate for universal admiration and esteem, and her hatred was as much dreaded as ever her smiles had been courted: for my own part, I always felt afraid of her, and never willingly found myself in her presence.

After I had obtained for madame de Valentinois the boon I solicited, I was conversing with the king respecting madame de Luxembourg, when the chancellor entered the room; he came to relate to his majesty an affair which had occasioned various reports, and much scandal. The viscount de Bombelles, an officer in an hussar regiment, had married a mademoiselle Camp.

Reasons, unnecessary for me to seek to discover, induced him, all at once, to annul his marriage, and profiting by a regulation which forbade all good Catholics from intermarrying with those of the reformed religion, he demanded the dissolution of his union with mademoiselle Camp. This attempt on his part to violate, upon such grounds, the sanctity of the nuptial vow, whilst it was calculated to rekindle the spirit of religious persecution, was productive of very unfavourable consequences to the character of M. de Bombelles; the great cry was against him, he stood alone and unsupported in the contest, for even the greatest bigots themselves would not intermeddle or appear to applaud a matter which attacked both honour and good feeling: the comrades of M. de Bombelles refused to associate with him; but the finishing stroke came from his old companions at the military school, where he had been brought up. On the 27th of November, 1771, the council of this establishment wrote him the following letter:—

«The military school have perused with equal indignation and grief the memorials which have appeared respecting you in the public prints. Had you not been educated in this establishment, we should merely have looked upon your affair with mademoiselle Camp as a scene too distressing for humanity and it would have been buried in our peaceful walls beneath the veil of modesty and silence; but we owe it to the youth sent to us by his majesty, for the inculcation of those principles which become the soldier as the man, not to pass over the present opportunity of inspiring them with a just horror of your misguided conduct, as well as feeling it an imperative duty to ourselves not to appear indifferent to the scandal and disgraceful confusion your proceedings have occasioned in the capital. We leave to the ministers of our religion, and the magistrates who are appointed to guard our laws, to decide upon the legality of the bonds between yourself and mademoiselle Camp, but by one tribunal you are distinctly pronounced guilty towards her, and that is the tribunal of honour, before that tribunal which exists in the heart of every good man. You have been universally cited and condemned. There are some errors which all the impetuosity of youth is unable to excuse, and yours are unhappily of that sort. The different persons composing this establishment, therefore, concur not only in praying of us to signify their sentiments, but likwise to apprize you, that you are unanimously forbidden to appear within these walls again.»

The chancellor brought to the king a copy of this severe letter, to which I listened with much emotion, nor did the king seem more calm than myself.

"This is, indeed," said he at length, "a very sad affair; we shall have all the quarrels of Protestantism renewed, as if I had not had already enough of those of the Jansenists and Jesuits. As far as I can judge, M. de Bombelles is entitled to the relief he seeks, and every marriage contracted with a Protestant is null and void by the laws of France."

"Oh, sire," cried I, "would I had married a Protestant."

The king smiled for a moment at my jest, then resumed:

"I blame the military school."

"Is it your majesty's pleasure," inquired the chancellor, "that I should signify your displeasure to them?"

"No, sir," replied Louis, "it does not come within your line of duty, and devolves rather upon the minister of war; and very possibly he would object to executing such a commission; for how could I step forward as the protector of one who would shake off the moral obligation of an oath directly it suits his inclinations to doubt its legality? This affair gives me great uneasiness, and involves the most serious consequences. You will see that I shall be overwhelmed with petitions and pamphlets, demanding of me the revocation of the edict of Nantes."

"And what, sire," asked the chancellor gravely, "could you do, that would better consolidate the glory of your reign?"

"Chancellor," exclaimed Louis XV., stepping back with unfeigned astonishment, "have you lost your senses? What would the clergy say or do? The very thought makes me shudder. Do you then believe, M. de Maupeou, that the race of the Clements, the Ravaillacs, the Damiens, are extinct in France?"

"Ah, sire, what needless fears."

"Not so needless as you may deem them," answered the king. "I have been caught once, I am not going to expose myself to danger a second time. You know the proverb,—no, no, let us leave things as my predecessors left them; besides, I shall not be sorry to leave a little employment for my successor; he may get through it how he can, and spite of all the clamouring of the philosophers, the Protestants shall hold their present privileges so long as I live. I will have neither civil nor religious war, but live in peace and eat my supper with a good appetite with you, my fair comtesse, for my constant guest, and you, M. de Maupeou, for this evening's visitor."

The conversation here terminated.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Madame du Barry purchases the services of Marin the gazetteer — Louis XV. and madame de Rumas — M. de Rumas and the comtesse du Barry — An intrigue — *Dénouement* — A present upon the occasion — The duc de Richelieu in disgrace — 100,000 livres.

THIS Marin, a provençal by birth, in his childhood one of the choristers, and afterwards organist of the village church, was, at the period of which I am speaking, one of the most useful men possible. Nominated by M. de St. Florentin to the post of censor royal, this friend to the philosophers was remarkable for the peculiar talent, with which he would alternately applaud and condemn the writings af these gentlemen. Affixing his sanction to two lines in a tragedy by Dorat had cost him twenty-four hours' meditation within the walls of the Bastille; and for permitting the representation of some opera (the name of which I forget) he had been deprived of a pension of 2,000 francs; but, wedded to the delights of his snug post, Marin always contrived, after every storm, to find his way back to its safe harbor. He had registered a vow never to resign the office of censor, but to keep it in despite of danger and difficulty. I soon discovered that he passed from the patronage of Lebel to that of Chamilly, and I was not slow in conjecturing that he joined to his avocations of censor and gazetteer that of purveyor to his majesty's *petits amours*.

Spite of my indefatigable endeavors to render Louis XV. happy and satisfied with the pleasures of his own home, he would take occasional wandering fits, and go upon the ramble, sometimes in pursuit of a high-born dame, at others eager to obtain a poor and simple *grisette;* and so long that the object of his fancy were but new to him, it mattered little what were her claims to youth, beauty, or rank in life. The maréchale de Mirepoix frequently said to me, « Do you know, my dear creature, that your royal admirer is but a very fickle swain, who is playing the gay gallant when he ought to be quietly seated at his own fireside. Have a care, he is growing old, and his intellect becomes more feeble each day; and what he would never have granted some few years back, may be easily wrung from him now. Chamilly aspires at governing his master, and Marin seconds him in his project.»

At length, roused to a sense of impending evil, by the constant reminding of the maréchale, I summoned Marin to my presence. « Now, sir,» said I, as he approached, « I would have you to know that I am apprised of all your tricks: you and your friend Chamilly are engaged in a very clever scheme to improve your own fortunes at the expense of the king your master.»

Marin burst into loud protestations of his innocence, declaring that he was as innocent as the lamb just born. I refused to believe this, and desired he would explain to me why he went so frequently to the apartments of M. Chamilly.

« Alas, madam!» replied Marin, « I go thither but to solicit his aid in craving the bounty of his majesty.»

« You are for ever pleading poverty, miserly being,» cried I; « you are far richer than I am; but since you want money I will supply you with it, and in return you shall be my secret newsman, and royal censor in my service. Now understand me clearly; every month that you faithfully bring me an account of certain goings on, I will count into your hand five and twenty *louis d'or.*»

I must confess that Marin only accepted my proposition with much reluctance, but still he did accept it, and withdrew, meditating, no doubt, how he should be enabled to satisfy both Chamilly and myself.

A long time elapsed before Marin brought me any news of importance, and I began to feel considerable doubts of his fidelity, when he came to communicate a very important piece of intelligence. He had just learned that

Chamilly frequently went to Paris, the bearer of letters from the king to a young and pretty female, named madame de Rumas, who resided in the old rue du Temple.

Here was a pretty discovery; the king actually engaged in a love affair, letters passing between him and his mistress, whilst the head *valet de chambre* was acting the part of Mercury to the lovers. This indeed required some speedy remedy, and I lost no time in summoning my privy counsellor, comte Jean, whom I acquainted with what had occurred, and begged his advice as to the best measures to be pursued. « Indeed, » replied my brother-in-law, « what others would do in our place would be to throw M. Chamilly from one of the windows of the château, and treat this his friend Marin with a lodging in the Bastille; but, as we are persons of temper and moderation, we will go more gently to work. I will, in the first place, gain every information relative to the affair, that I may satisfy myself Marin is not seeking to show his honest claims to your gold, by imposing a forged tale upon your credulity; when that is ascertained we will decide upon our next best step. »

Comte Jean departed to seek the assistance of M. de Sartines, who was at that time entirely devoted to my interests; and, after having diligently searched the whole rue du Temple, he succeeded in discovering madame de Rumas. He learnt that this lady had recently married a person of her own rank, to whom she professed to be violently attached; that they lived together with great tranquillity, and had the reputation of conducting themselves as persons of extreme propriety and regularity; paid their debts, and avoided, by their air of neatness, order, and modest reserve, the scandal of even their most ill-natured neighbors. The husband was said to be a great religionist, which increased the suspicions of comte Jean. With regard to the epistolary correspondence carried on by the lady, no information could be gleaned in that quarter.

Marin was again sent for by my brother-in-law, who questioned and cross-questioned with so much address, that Marin found it impossible to conceal any longer the remaining part of the affair, of which he had before communicated but so much as his policy deemed advisable. He confessed that he had originally mentioned madame de Rumas (whom he himself had long known) to Chamilly, had shown him several of her letters; and, as he expected, the style of these epistles so pleased the head valet, that he expressed a wish to see the fair writer. Marin accordingly introduced him to the rue du Temple, where he was most graciously received, and returned home enchanted with the lady: he spoke of her to the king, strongly recommending his majesty to judge for himself. Accordingly his majesty wrote to madame de Rumas, who received the letter from the hands of her friend Chamilly with all pomp and state, talked first of her own virtue and honor, and afterwards of her dutiful respect for his majesty. She replied to the royal note in so prudent yet obliging a manner, that the king was enchanted. This effective billet was answered by a second letter from the king, which obtained a reply even more tenderly charming than the one which preceded it. An interview was next solicited and granted; for a visit was such a trifle to refuse. The royal guest became pressing and the lady more reserved, till the time was lost in attempts at convincing each other. At the next interview madame de Rumas freely confessed her sincere attachment for his majesty, but added, that such was her desire to possess his whole and undivided regard, that she could never give herself up to the hope of keeping him exclusively hers whilst I interposed between her and the king's heart—in a few words then she demanded my dismissal. This was going too far; and Louis XV., who thought it no scandal to have a hundred mistresses, was alarmed at the thoughts of occasioning the bustle and confusion attendant upon disgracing his acknowledged favorite and recognised mistress; he therefore assured her, her request was beyond his power to grant.

Madame de Rumas now sought to compromise the affair, by talking of a share in his favor. She asked, she said, but the heart of her beloved monarch, and would freely leave me in possession of all power and influence.

The king whose heart was regularly promised once a day, did not hesitate to assure her of his fidelity, and his wily enslaver flattered herself, that with time and clever management, she should succeed in inducing him to break off those ties which he now refused to break.

Things were in this state when Marin divulged to us the intrigue conducted by Chamilly, and directed, though in a covert manner, by the maréchal duc de Richelieu. This spiteful old man possessed no share of the talent of his family; and, not contented with the favor bestowed on his nephew, thought only of his personal credit and influence, which he fancied he should best secure by introducing a new mistress to the king. This well-concocted scheme threw both comte Jean and myself into a perfect fury. We dismissed Marin with a present of fifty louis, and my brother-in-law besought of me to grant him four and twenty hours undisturbed reflection, whilst, on my side, I assured him I should not rest until we had completely discomfited our enemies.

On the following day comte Jean laid before me several projects, which were far from pleasing in my eyes; too much time was required in their execution. I knew the king too well to be blind to the danger of allowing this mere whim of the moment to take root in his mind. One idea caught my fancy, and without mentioning it to comte Jean, I determined upon carrying it into execution.

The maréchale de Mirepoix happened at this moment not to be at Paris at her hotel in the rue Bergère, but at her country house, situated au Port à l'Anglaise. I signified to the king my intention of passing a couple of days with the maréchale, and accordingly set out for that purpose. Upon my arrival at Paris I merely changed horses, and proceeded onwards with all possible despatch to rejoin the maréchale, who was quite taken by surprise at my unexpected arrival. After many mutual embraces and exchange of civilities, I explained to her the whole affair which had brought me from Versailles. The good-natured maréchale could not believe her ears. She soon, however, comprehended the nature of my alarms; and so far from seeking to dissipate them, urged me to lose no time in crushing an affair, which grew more threatening from each day's delay. I was fully of her opinion, and only asked her assistance and co-operation in my plan of writing to M. de Rumas, and inviting him to come on the following day to the house of madame de Mirepoix.

That lady would doubtless have preferred my asking her to assist me in any other way, but still she could not refuse to serve me in the manner described: for I either bestowed on her all she desired, or caused others to gratify her slightest request; and how could she be sure, that were my reign to end, she might derive the same advantages from any new favorite? Self-interest therefore bound her to my service, and accordingly she wrote to M. de Rumas a very pressing letter, requesting to see him on the following day upon matters of the highest importance. This letter sent off, I dined with the maréchale, and then returned to sleep at Paris.

On the following day. at an early hour, I repaired to the Port à l'Anglaise; M. de Rumas arrived there a few minutes after myself. He had the air and look of an honest man, but perhaps no species of deceit is more easily detected than that quiet, subdued manner, compressed lips, and uplifted eye. Now-a-days such a mode of dissembling would be too flimsy to impose even on children; and hypocrites are ever greater proficients in their art than was even M. de Rumas.

Madame de Mirepoix left us alone together, in order that I might converse more freely with him. I knew not how to begin, but made many attempts to convey, in an indirect manner, the reasons for his being summoned to that day's conference. However, hints and insinuations were alike thrown away upon one who had determined neither to use eyes nor ears but as interest pointed out the reasonableness of so doing; and accordingly, unable longer to repress my impatience, I exclaimed abruptly,

«Pray, sir, do you know who I am?»

«Yes, madam,» replied he, with a profound bow, and look of the deepest humility, «you are the comtesse du Barry.»

« Well, sir, » added I, « and you are equally well aware, no doubt, of the relation in which I stand to the king? »

« But, madam — »

« Nay, sir, answer without hesitation; I wish you to be candid, otherwise my exceeding frankness may displease you. »

« I know, madam, » replied the hypocrite, « that his majesty finds great pleasure in your charming society. »

« And yet, sir, » answered I, « his majesty experiences equal delight in the company of your wife. How answer you that, M. de Rumas? »

« My wife, madam! »

« Yes, sir, in the company of madame de Rumas; he pays her many private visits, secretly corresponds with her — »

« The confidence of his majesty must ever honor his subjects. »

« But, » replied I, quickly, « may dishonor a husband. »

« How, madam! What is it you would insinuate? »

« That your wife would fain supplant me, and that she is now the mistress of the king, although compelled to be such in secret. »

« Impossible, » exclaimed M. de Rumas, « and some enemy to my wife has thus aspersed her to you. »

« And do you treat it as a mere calumny? » said I. « No, sir, nothing can be more true; and if you would wish further confirmation, behold the letter which madame de Rumas wrote to the king only the day before yesterday; take it and read it. »

« Heaven preserve me, madam, » exclaimed the time-serving wretch, « from presuming to cast my eyes over what is meant only for his majesty's gracious perusal; it would be an act of treason I am not capable of committing. »

« Then, sir, » returned I, « I may reasonably conclude that it is with your sanction and concurrence your wife intrigues with the king? »

« Ah, madam, » answered the wily de Rumas, in a soft and expostulating tone, « trouble not, I pray you, the repose of my family. I know too well the virtue of madame de Rumas, her delicacy, and the severity of her principles; I know too well likewise the sentiments in which her excellent parents educated her, and I defy the blackest malice to injure her in my estimation."

"Wonderfully, sir!" cried I; "so you determine to believe your wife's virtue incorruptible, all the while you are profiting by her intrigues. However, I am too certain of what I assert to look on with the culpable indifference you are pleased to assume, whilst your *virtuous* wife is seeking to supplant me at the château; you shall hear of me before long. Adieu, sir."

So saying, I quitted the room in search of the maréchale, to whom I related what had passed.

"And now, what think you of so base a hypocrite?" asked I, when I had finished my account.

"He well deserves having the mask torn from his face," replied she; "but give yourself no further concern; return home, and depend upon it, that, one way or other, I will force him into the path of honor."

I accordingly ordered my carriage and returned to Versailles, where, on the same evening, I received the following letter from the maréchale:—

"MY DEAR COUNTESS,—My efforts have been attended with no better success than yours. Well may the proverb say, 'There is none so deaf as he who will not hear,' and M. de Rumas perseveres in treating all I advanced respecting his wife as calumnious falsehoods. According to his version of the tale, madame de Rumas has no other motive in seeing Louis XV. so frequently, but to implore his aid in favor of the poor in her neighborhood. I really lost all patience when I heard him attempting to veil his infamous conduct under the mask of charity; I therefore proceeded at once to menaces, telling him that you had so many advantages over his wife, that you scorned to consider her your rival; but that, nevertheless, you did not choose that any upstart pretender should dare ask to share his majesty's heart. To all this he made no reply; and as the sight of him only increased my indignation, I at length desired him to quit me. I trust you will pardon me for having spoken in as queenlike a manner as you could have done yourself.

"Adieu, my sweet friend."

This letter was far from satisfying me, and I determined upon striking a decisive blow. I sent for Chamilly, and treating him with all the contempt he deserved, I told him, that if the king did not immediately give up this woman he might prepare for his own immediate dismissal. At first Chamilly sought to appease my anger by eager protestations of innocence, but when he found I already knew the whole affair, and was firmly fixed in my determination, he became alarmed, threw himself at my knees, and promised to do all I would have him. We then agreed to tell Louis XV. some tale of madame de Rumas that should effectually deter him from thinking further of her.

In pursuance with this resolution, Chamilly informed the king, that he had just been informed that madame de Rumas had a lover, who boasted of being able to turn his majesty which way he pleased, through the intervention of his mistress. Louis XV. wrote off instantly to M. de Sartines, to have a watchful eye over the proceedings of the Rumas family. The lieutenant of police, who had some regard for me, and a still greater portion of fear, was faithful to my interests, and rendered to Louis XV. the most horrible particulars of the profligate mode of life pursued by madame de Rumas; assuring him, that from every consideration of personal safety, his majesty should shun the acquaintance. The king, incensed at the trick put upon him by these seemingly virtuous people, was at first for confining both husband and wife in prison, but this measure I opposed with all my power; for, satisfied with the victory I had gained, I cared for no further hurt to my adversaries. I contrived to insinuate to the worthy pair the propriety of their avoiding the impending storm by a timely retreat into the country, a hint they were wise enough to follow up, so that I was entirely freed from all further dread of their machinations.

All those who had served me in this affair I liberally rewarded; Marin received for his share 500 louis. It is true he lost the confidence of Chamilly, but he gained mine instead, so that it will easily be believed he was no sufferer by the exchange. I caused the maréchale to receive from the king a superb Turkey carpet, to which I added a complete service of Sèvres porcelain, with a beautiful breakfast set, on which were landscapes most delicately and skilfully drawn in blue and gold: I gave her also two large blue porcelain cots, as finely executed as those you have so frequently admired in my small saloon. These trifles cost me no less a sum than 2800 livres. I did not forget my good friend M. de Sartines, who received a cane, headed with gold, around which was a small band of diamonds. As for Chamilly, I granted him his pardon; and I think you will admit that was being sufficiently generous.

After having thus recompensed the zeal of my friends, I had leisure to think of taking vengeance upon the duc de Richelieu for the part he had acted. He came of his own accord to throw himself into the very heat of my anger. He had been calling on the maréchale de Mirepoix, where he had seen with envious eyes the magnificent carpet I had presented her with; the cupidity of the duke induced him, after continually recurring to the subject, to say, that where my friends were concerned, no one could accuse me of want of liberality. « No, sir, » answered I, « I consider that no price can sufficiently repay the kind and faithful services of a true friend, nor can baseness and treachery be too generally exposed and punished. » From the tone in which I spoke the old maréchal easily perceived to what I was alluding. He was wise enough to be silent, whilst I followed up this first burst of my indignation, by adding,

« For instance, monsieur le duc, how can I sufficiently repay your friendly zeal to supply the king with a new mistress ? »

« I, madam ? »

« Yes, sir, you; I am aware of all your kind offices, and only lament my inability to reward them in a suitable manner. »

« In that case I shall not attempt to deny my share in the business. »

« You have then sufficient honor to avow your enmity towards me ? »

« By no means enmity, madam. I merely admit my desire to contribute to the amusement of the king, and surely, when I see all around anxious to promote the gratification of their sovereign, I need not be withheld from following so loyal an example. The duc de Duras was willing to present his own relation for his majesty's acceptance, the abbé Terray offers his own daughter, comte Jean his sister-in-law, whilst I simply threw a humble and modest female in his majesty's path. I cannot see in what my fault exceeds that of the gentlemen I have just mentioned."

"You really are the most audacious of men," replied I, laughing; "I shall be obliged to solicit a *lettre de cachet* to hold you a prisoner in Guienne. Upon my word, your nephew and myself have a valuable and trustworthy friend in you."

"Hark ye, madam," rejoined the maréchal. "I know not, in the first place, whether his majesty would very easily grant you this *lettre de cachet*, which most certainly I do not deserve. You have served my nephew and neglected me; I wished to try the strength of my poor wings, and I find, like many others, that I must not hope to soar to any height."

While we were thus talking the maréchale de Mirepoix was announced. I was still much agitated, and she immediately turned towards the duke, as if to inquire of him the cause of my distress: upon which, M. de Richelieu related all that had passed with a cool exactitude that enraged me still further. When he had finished, I said,

"Well, madame la maréchale, and what is your opinion of all this?"

"Upon my word, my dear countess," answered madame de Mirepoix, "you have ample cause for complaint, but still this poor duke is not so culpable as you imagine him to be. He has large expenses to provide for: and to obtain the money requisite for them he is compelled to look to his majesty, whose favor he desires to win by administering to his pleasures."

"Alas!" replied the duke, "can you believe that but for the pressure of unavoidable circumstances I would have separated myself from my nephew and my fair friend there?"

"Come, come," cried the maréchale, "I must restore peace and harmony between you. As for you, my lord duke, be a true and loyal subject; and you, my sweet countess, use your best endeavors to prevail on the king to befriend and assist his faithful servant."

I allowed myself to be managed like a child; and instead of scratching the face of M. de Richelieu, I obtained for him a grant of 100,000 livres, which the court banker duly counted out to him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A prefatory remark — Madame Brillant — The maréchale de Luxembourg's cat — Despair of the maréchale — The ambassador, Beaumarchais, and the duc de Chaulnes — The comte d'Aranda — Louis XV. and his relics — The abbé de Beauvais — His sermons — He is appointed bishop.

When I related to comte Jean my reconciliation with the duc de Richelieu, and the sum which this treaty had cost me, my brother-in-law flew into the most violent fury; he styled the maréchal a plunderer of the public treasury. Well may the scripture tell us we see the mote in our neighbor's eye, but regard not the beam which is in our own eye. I was compelled to impose silence on comte Jean, or in the height of his rage he would have offered some insult to the old maréchal, who already most heartily disliked him for the familiarity of his tone and manner towards him. I did all in my power to keep these two enemies from coming in each other's way, counselled to that by the maréchale de Mirepoix, whose line of politics was of the most pacific nature; besides I had no inclination for a war carried on in my immediate vicinity, and, for my own part, so far from wishing to harm any one, I quickly forgave every affront offered to myself.

But hold! I perceive I am running on quite smoothly in my own praise. Indeed, my friend, it is well I have taken that office upon myself, for I fear no one else would undertake it. The most atrocious calumnies have been invented against me; I have been vilified both in prose and verse; and, amongst the great number of persons on whom I have conferred the greatest obligations, none has been found with sufficient courage or gratitude to stand forward and undertake my defence. I do not even except madame de Mirepoix, whose conduct towards me in former days was marked by the most studied attention. She came to me one evening, with a face of grief.

« Mercy upon me,» cried I, « what ails you ? »

« Alas! » replied she, in a piteous tone, « I have just quitted a most afflicted family; their loss is heavy and irreparable. The maréchale de Luxembourg is well nigh distracted with grief. »

« Good heavens! » exclaimed I, « can the duchesse de Lauzun be dead ? »

« Alas! no. »

« Perhaps poor madame de Boufflers ? »

« No, my friend. »

« Who then is the object of so much regret ? Speak; tell me. »

« Madame Brillant. »

« A friend of the old maréchale's ? »

« More than a friend,» replied madame de Mirepoix; « her faithful companion; her only companion; her only beloved object, since her lovers and admirers ceased to offer their homage—in a word, her cat. »

« Bless me! » cried I, « how you frightened me! but what sort of a cat could this have been to cause so many tears ? »

« Is it possible that you do not know madame Brillant, at least by name ? »

« I assure you,» said I, « this is the very first time I ever heard her name. »

« Well, if it be so, I will be careful not to repeat such a thing to madame de Luxembourg; she would never pardon you for it. Listen, my dear countess,» continued madame de Mirepoix; « under the present circumstances it will be sufficient for you to write your name in her visiting-book. »

I burst into a fit of laughter.

« It is no joke, I promise you,» exclaimed the maréchale ; « the death of madame Brillant is a positive calamity to madame de Luxembourg. Letters of condolence will arrive from Chanteloup; madame du Deffant will be in deep affliction, and the virtues and amiable qualities of the deceased cat will long furnish subjects of conversation.»

« It was then a singularly engaging animal, I presume?»

« On the contrary, one of the most stupid, disagreeable, and dirty creatures of its kind; but still it was the cat of madame de Luxembourg.»

And after this funeral oration the maréchale and myself burst into a violent fit of laughter.

When the king joined us, I acquainted him with this death, and my conversation with the maréchale. Louis XV. listened to my recital with an air of gravity; when I had finished, he said,

« The present opportunity is admirably adopted for satisfying the request of one of my retinue, one of the best-hearted creatures, and at the same time one of the silliest men in the kingdom.»

« I beg your pardon, sire,» cried I, « but what is his name? For the description is so general, that I fear lest I should be at a loss to recollect of whom you are speaking.»

« You are very ill-natured,» cried Louis XV., « and I hardly know whether you deserve to be gratified by hearing the name of the poor gentleman: however, I will tell it to you; he is called Corbin de la Chevrollerie. A few days since this simple young man, having solicited an audience, informed me, that he was desirous of marrying a rich heiress, but that the young lady's family were resolved she should marry no one who was not previously employed as an ambassador. I expressed my surprise at so strange a caprice, but the poor fellow endeavored to vindicate his bride's relations, by stating that they were willing to consider him as my ambassador if I would only commission him to carry some message of compliment or condolence. Accordingly I promised to employ him upon the occasion of the first death or marriage which should take place in a ducal family. Now, I think I cannot do better than make him the bearer of my inquiries after the maréchale de Luxembourg.»

This idea struck me as highly amusing, and I immediately dispatched a servant to summon M. de la Chevrollerie to the presence of the king. This being done, that gentleman presented himself with all the dignity and importance of one who felt that a mission of high moment was about to be entrusted to him.

His majesty charged him to depart immediately to the house of madame de Luxembourg, and to convey his royal master's sincere condolences for the heavy loss she had sustained in madame Brillant.

M. Corbin de la Chevrollerie departed with much pride and self-complacency upon his embassy: he returned in about half an hour.

« Sire, » cried he, « I have fulfilled your royal pleasure to madame de Luxembourg. She desires me to thank you most humbly for your gracious condescension: she is in violent distress for the severe loss she has experienced, and begged my excuse for quitting me suddenly, as she had to superintend the stuffing of the deceased. »

« The stuffing! » exclaimed the king; « surely you mean the embalming? »

« No, sire, » replied the ambassador, gravely, « the stuffing. »

« Monsieur de la Chevrollerie, » cried I, bursting into a violent fit of laughter, « do you know in what degree of relationship the deceased madame Brillant stood to madame de Luxembourg? »

« No, madam, » replied the ambassador, gravely, « but I believe she was her aunt, for I heard one of the females in waiting say, that this poor madame Brillant was very old, and that she had lived with her mistress during the last fourteen years. »

Thus finished this little jest. However, Louis XV., who was extremely kind to all about him, especially those in his service, shortly after recompensed his simple-minded ambassador, by intrusting him with a commission at once profitable and honorable.

Another event which took place at this period, caused no less noise than the death of madame Brillant. At this time, mademoiselle Mesnard was, for her many charms of mind and person, the general rage throughout Paris. Courtiers, lawyers, bankers, and citizens crowded alike to offer their homage. Frail as fair, mademoiselle Mesnard received all kindly, and took with gracious smiles the rich gifts showered upon her by her various adorers. The first noblemen of the court, knights of the different orders, farmers-general, all aspired to the honor of ruining themselves for her. She had already satisfied the ruinous propensities of at least a dozen of lovers, when the duc de Chaulnes entered the lists, and was fortunate enough to eclipse all his rivals. He might long have enjoyed the preference thus obtained, but for an act of the greatest imprudence of which a lover could be guilty. He was so indiscreet as to invite several of his most intimate friends to sup with himself and Mademoiselle Mesnard. Amongst the number was Caron de Beaumarchais, a man possessed of the grace of a prince and the generous profusion of a highwayman. Caron de Beaumarchais attracted the fancy of the fickle mademoiselle Mesnard, a mutual understanding was soon established between them, and in a snug little cottage surrounded by beautiful grounds in the environs of Père la Chaise, the enamored lovers frequently met to exchange their soft vows.

Happily the deity who presided over the honor of the duke was carefully watching their proceedings. This guardian angel was no other than madame Duverger, his former mistress, who, unable to bear the desertion of her noble admirer, had vowed, in the first burst of rage and disappointment, to have revenge sooner or later upon her triumphant rival. With this view she spied out all the proceedings of mademoiselle Mesnard, whose stolen interviews and infidelity she was not long in detecting; she even contrived to win over a *femme de chambre*, by whose connivance she was enabled to obtain possession of several letters containing irrefragable proofs of guilt, and these she immediately forwarded to the duc de Chaulnes.

This proud and haughty nobleman might have pardoned his mistress had she quitted him for a peer of the realm and his equal, but to be supplanted by a mere man of business, an author, too! — the disgrace was too horrible for endurance. The enraged lover flew to Beaumarchais, and reproached him bitterly with his treachery; the latter sought to deny the charge, but the duke, losing all self-possession, threw the letters in his face, calling him a base liar. At this insult, Beaumarchais, who, whatever his enemies may say of him, was certainly not deficient in courage, demanded instant satisfaction. The duke, by way of answer, seized the man of letters by the collar, Beaumarchais called his servants, who, in their turn, summoned the guard, which speedily arrived accompanied by the commissary, and with much difficulty they succeeded in removing M. de Chaulnes (who appeared to have entirely lost his reason) from the room.

The conduct of the duke appeared to us completely out of place, and he would certainly have answered for it within the walls of the Bastille, had not his family made great intercession for him. On the other hand, Beaumarchais, who eagerly availed himself of every opportunity of writing memorials, composed one on the subject of his quarrel with M. de Chaulnes, complaining that a great nobleman had dared to force himself into his house, and lay forcible hands on him, as though he were a thief or a felon. The whole of the pamphlet which related to this affair was admirably written, and, like the « Barber of Seville," marked by a strongly sarcastic vein. However, the thing failed, and the duc de la Vrillière, the sworn enemy of men of wit and talent, caused Beaumarchais to be immediately confined within Fort l'Evêque. So that the offended party was made to suffer the penalty of the offence.

In the same year the comte de Fuentes, ambassador from Spain to the court of Louis XV., took leave of us. He was replaced by the comte d'Aranda, who was in a manner in disgrace with his royal master: this nobleman arrived preceded by a highly flattering reputation. In the first place, he had just completed the destruction of the Jesuits, and this was entitling him to no small thanks and praises from encyclopedists. Every one knows those two lines of Voltaire's —

> «*Aranda dans l'Espagne instruisant les fidèles,*
> *A l'inquisition vient de rogner les ailes.*»

The simplicity of comte d'Aranda indemnified us in some degree for the haughty superciliousness of his predecessor. Although no longer young, he still preserved all the tone and vigor of his mind, and only the habit which appeared to have been born with him of reflecting, gave him a slow and measured tone in speaking. His reserved and embarrassed manners were but ill-calculated to show the man as he really was, and it required all the advantages of intimacy to see him in his true value. You may attach so much more credit to what I say of this individual, as I can only add, that he was by no means one of my best friends.

When Louis XV. heard of the nomination of the comte d'Aranda to the embassy from Spain to France, he observed to me,

« The king of Spain gets rid of his Choiseul by sending him to me.»

« Then why not follow so excellent an example, sire ?» replied I; « and since your Choiseul is weary of Chanteloup, why not command him upon some political errand to the court of Madrid.»

« Heaven preserve me from such a thing,» exclaimed Louis XV. « Such a man as he is ought never to quit the kingdom, and I have been guilty of considerable oversight to leave him the liberty of so doing. But to return to comte d'Aranda; he has some merit I understand; still I like not that class of persons around me; they are inexorable censors, who condemn alike every action of my life.»

However, not the king's greatest enemy could have found fault with his manner of passing his leisure hours. A great part of each day was occupied in a mysterious manufacture of cases for relics, and one of his *valets de chambre*, named Turpigny, was intrusted with the commission of purchasing old shrines and reliquaries;

he caused the sacred bones, or whatever else they contain, to be taken out by Grandelatz, one of his almoners, re-adjusted, and then returned to new cases. These reliquaries were distributed by him to his daughters, or any ladies of the court of great acknowledged piety. When I heard of this I mentioned it to the king, who wished at first to conceal the fact; but, as he was no adept at falsehood or disguise, he was compelled to admit the fact.

« I trust, sire,» said I, « that you will bestow one of your prettiest and best-arranged reliquaries on me.»

« No, no,» returned he, hastily, « that cannot be.»

« And why not ? » asked I.

« Because,» answered he, « it would be sinful of me. Ask anything else in my power to bestow, and it shall be yours.»

This was no hypocrisy on the part of Louis XV., who, spite of his somewhat irregular mode of life, professed to hold religion in the highest honor and esteem; to all that it proscribed he paid the submission of a child. We had ample proofs of this in the sermons preached at Versailles by the abbé de Beauvais, afterwards bishop of Senetz.

This ecclesiastic, filled with an inconsiderate zeal, feared not openly to attack the king in his public discourses; he even went so far as to interfere with many things of which he was not a competent judge, and which by no means belonged to his jurisdiction: in fact, there were ample grounds for sending the abbé to the Bastille. The court openly expressed its dissatisfaction at this audacity, and for my own part I could not avoid evincing the lively chagrin it caused me. Yet, would you believe it, Louis XV. declared, in a tone from which there was no appeal, that this abbé had merely done his duty, and that those who had been less scrupulous in the performance of theirs, would do well to be silent on the subject. This was not all; the cardinal de la Roche Aymon, his grand almoner, refused to sanction the nomination of M. de Beauvais to the bishopric, under the pretext of his not being nobly descended.

M. de Beyons, bishop of Carcassone, a prelate of irreproachable character, was deeply distressed to find that the want of birth would exclude M. de Beauvais from the dignities of his holy profession. He went to discuss the matter with the grand almoner, who again advanced his favorite plea for excluding M. de Beauvais. « My lord,» replied M. de Beyons, « if I believed that nobility of descent were the chief requisite for our advancement in our blessed calling, I would trample my crosier under foot, and renounce for ever all church dignities.»

M. de Beyons sought the king, and loudly complained to him of the infatuation and obstinacy of M. de la Roche Aymon. Louis XV. however commanded that M. de Beauvais should be appointed to the first vacant see, and when the grand almoner repeated his objections to the preferment, the king answered, « Monsieur le cardinal, in the days of our blessed Saviour the apostles had no need to present their genealogical tree, duly witnessed and attested. It is my pleasure to make M. de Beauvais a bishop; let that end the discussion of the matter.»

The command was too peremptory to admit of any course but instant and entire submission.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

M. D——n and madame de Blessac — Anecdote — The rendezvous and the ball — The wife of Gaubert — They wish to give her to the king — Intrigues — Their results — Letter from the duc de la Vrillière to the countess — Reply — Reconciliation.

AMONGST the pages of the chapel was one whom the king distinguished so greatly, that he raised him to the rank of a gentleman of the bedchamber, and confided to his charge the cabinet of medals, for which he had imbibed a taste since his *liaison* with madame de Pompadour. This esteemed page was named M. D——n, who united to the most amiable wit a varied and deep knowledge of men and things. He had had adventures at an age when they are usually just understood, and talked of them with the utmost indiscretion. But this so far from doing him any injury in the eyes of the world only served to make him the more admired; for women in general have an inclination for those who do not respect their reputation.

At the period I allude to a madame de Blessac, a very well-looking woman, took upon herself to be very kindly disposed towards the gentleman-in-waiting. She told him so, and thereupon M. de D——n ranged himself under her banner, and swore eternal constancy. However, the lady, by some accident, became greatly smitten with the prince de la Trimouille, and without quitting the little keeper of medals, gave him a lord for a substitute. M. D——n soon learnt this fact, that he was not the sole possessor of a heart which formed all his joy and glory. He found he was deceived, and he swore to be revenged.

Now the prince de la Trimouille had for his mistress mademoiselle Lubert, an opera-dancer, very pretty and extraordinarily silly. M. D——n went to her; "Mademoiselle," said he, "I come to offer my services to you in the same way that M. de la Trimouille has offered his to madame de Blessac, with whom I was on exceedingly intimate terms."

The services of young D——n were accepted, and he was happy. He then wrote to his former mistress, saying, that anxious to give her a proof of his sincere attachment he had visited mademoiselle Lubert, that he might leave her at leisure to receive the visits of the prince de la Trimouille.

Madame de Blessac, stung to the quick, quarrelled with the prince, who was excessively enraged with his rival; and there certainly would have been an affair between these two gentlemen, had not the king preserved the peace by sending his gentleman to St. Petersburg as *attaché* to the embassy. M. D——n went to Russia, therefore, and on his return came to see me, and is now one of the most welcome and agreeable of the men of my private circle.

As to madame de Blessac, she continued to carry on the war in grand style. Her husband dying she married again a foolish count, three parts ruined, and who speedily dissipated the other quarter of his own fortune and the whole of his wife's. Madame Ramoski then attacked the rich men of the day one after another. One alone stood out against her; it was M. de la Garde, who had been one of my admirers. Madame Ramoski wrote to him; he did not answer. At length she determined on visiting him, and wrote him a note, to say that she should call upon him about six o'clock in the evening. What did M. de la Garde? Why he gave a ball on that very evening; and, when madame Ramoski reached his hotel, she found it illuminated. As she had come quite unprepared she was compelled to return as she came, very discontentedly.

But to leave madame de Blessac and M. D——n, and to talk of my own matters. We had at this period a very great alarm at the château, caused by the crime of a man, who preferred rather to assassinate his wife than to allow her to dishonor him. It is worthy of narration.

A pretty shopkeeper of Paris, named Gaubert, who lived in the rue de la Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, had recently married a woman much younger than himself. From the Petit Pont to the rue Mouffetard, madame Gaubert was talked of for her lovely face and beautiful figure; she was the Venus of the quarter. Everybody paid court to her, but she listened to none of her own rank, for her vanity suggested that she deserved suitors of a loftier rank.

Her husband was very jealous. Unfortunately M. Gaubert had for cousin one of the valets of the king: this man, who knew the taste of his master, thought how he could best turn his pretty cousin to account. He spoke to her of the generosity of Louis XV., of the grandeur of Versailles, and of the part which her beauty entitled her to play there. In fact, he so managed to turn the head of this young woman, that she begged him to obtain for her a place in the king's favor. Consequently Girard (that was his name) went to madame de Laugeac, and told her the affair as it was. She pleased with an opportunity of injuring me, went to Paris, and betook herself *incog.* to the shop of madame Gaubert. She found her charming, and spoke of her to the duç de la Vrillière, and both agreed to show her portrait to his majesty. But how to procure this portrait? Her husband was her very shadow, and never left her. *Le petit saint*, who was never at a loss, issued a *lettre de cachet* against him, and the unfortunate man was shut up in Fort l'Evêque. It was not until the portrait was finished that he was set at liberty.

He returned to his home without guessing at the motives of his detention, but he learned that his wife had had her portrait painted during his absence, and his jealousy was set to work. Soon a letter from Girard, a fatal letter, which fell into his hands, convinced him of the injury done him. He took his wife apart, and, feigning a resignation which he did not feel, "My love," he said, "I loved thee, I love thee still: I thought, too, that thou wert content with our competence, and wouldst not have quitted thine husband for any other in the world: I have been convinced otherwise. A letter from Girard informs me, that with thine own consent the king, whom thy portrait has pleased, desires to see thee this very day. It is a misfortune, but we must submit. Only before thou art established at Versailles, I should wish thee to dine with me once more. You can invite cousin Girard, too, for I owe him something for what he has done for thee."

The young wife promised to return and see her husband. That evening at the performance at the court she was seated in the same box with the marquise de Laugeac; the king's glass was directed towards her the whole time, and at the termination of the spectacle it was announced to her, that she was to sleep at the château the next evening. The project was never realized.

The next day, according to promise, the young wife went to Paris with the valet. She informed her husband of the success which had befallen her, and he appeared delighted. Dinner being ready, they seated themselves at table, ate and drank. Girard began to laugh at his cousin for his complaisance, when suddenly all desire to jest left him. He experienced most horrible pains, and his cousin suffered as well as himself. "Wretches!" said Gaubert to them, "did you think I would brook dishonor? No, no! I have deceived you both the better to wreak my vengeance. I am now happy. Neither king nor valet shall ever possess my wife. I have poisoned you, and you must die." The two victims implored his pity. "Yes," said he to his wife, "thy sufferings pain me, and I will free you from them." He then plunged a knife to her heart; and, turning to Girard, said, "As for thee, I hate thee too much to kill thee; die." And he left him.

The next day M. de Sartines came and told me the whole story. He had learnt them from the valet, who had survived his poisoning for some hours. Gaubert could not be found, and it was feared that he would attempt some desperate deed. No one dared mention it to the king, but the captain of the guards and the first gentleman in waiting took every possible precaution; and when Louis XV. asked for the young female who was to be brought to him, they told him that she had died of a violent distemper. It was not until some days afterwards that the terror which pervaded the château ceased. They had found the body of the unfortunate Gaubert on the banks of the Seine.

In spite of what had passed, the duc de la Vrillière had the impudence to present himself to me. I treated him with disdain, reproaching him and Laugeac for their conduct. He left me in despair, and wrote me the following letter: —

« Madame la comtesse, — Your anger kills me. I am guilty, but not so much so as you may imagine. The duty of my office compels me to do many things which are disagreeable to me. In the affair for which you have so slightingly treated me there was no intent to injure you, but only to procure for the king an amusement which should make him the more estimate your charms and your society. Forgive a fault in which my heart bore no share; I am sufficiently miserable, and shall not know repose until I be reinstated in your good graces.

« As for the poor marchioness she is no more to blame than myself. She feels for you as much esteem as attachment, and is anxious to prove it at any opportunity. I beseech you not to treat her rigorously. Think that we only work together for the good of the king, and that it would be unjust of you to hate us because we have endeavored to please this excellent prince. I hope that, contented with this justification, you will not refuse to grant me the double amnesty which I ask of your goodness.»

I replied thus: —

« Your letter, monsieur le duc, seduces me no more than your words. I know you well, and appreciate you fully. I was ignorant up to this time, that amongst the duties of your office, certain such functions were imposed upon you. It appears that you attend to them as well as to others, and I sincerely compliment you thereupon; I beg of you to announce it in the ‹Court Kalendar.› It will add, I am convinced, to the universal esteem in which you are held.

« As to madame de Laugeac, she is even more insignificant than you, and that is not saying much. I thank her for her esteem and attachment, but can dispense with any marks of them; no good can come from such an one as she. Thus, M. le duc, keep quiet both of you, and do not again attempt measures which may compromise me. Do your business and leave me to mine.

«I am, with all due consideration,

«Your servant,

«Comtesse du Barry.»

I mentioned this to the king, who insisted on reconciling me with *le petit saint*, who came and knelt to me. I granted the pardon sought out of regard for Louis XV.; but from that moment the contempt I felt for the duke increased an hundredfold.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Conversation with the king — Marriage of the comte d'Artois — Intrigues — The place of lady of honor — The maréchale de Mirepoix — The comtesse de Forcalquier and madame du Barry — The comtesse de Forcalquier and madame de Boncault.

The king was much annoyed at the indifference I evinced for all state secrets, and frequently observed to me, "You are not at all like madame de Pompadour: she was never satisfied unless she knew all that was going on, and was permitted to take an active part in every transaction; she would frequently scold me for not telling her things of which I was myself ignorant. She was at the bottom of the most secret intrigues, and watched every turn of my countenance, as though she sought to read in my eyes the inmost thoughts of my mind. Never," continued the king, "did woman more earnestly desire supreme command; and so completely had she learned to play my part, that I have frequently surprised her giving private instructions to my ambassadors, differing altogether from what I myself had dictated to them. Upon the same principle she maintained at various courts envoys and ministers, who acted by her orders, and in her name; she even succeeded in obtaining the friendship of the grave and austere Marie Thérèse, who ultimately carried her condescension so far, as only to address the marchioness by the title of 'cousin' and 'dear friend.' I must confess, however, that these proceedings on the part of madame de Pompadour were by no means agreeable to me, and I even prefer your ignorance of politics to her incessant interference with them."

This was said by Louis XV. upon the occasion of the approaching marriage of the comte d'Artois, the object of universal cabal and court intrigue to all but myself, who preserved perfect tranquillity amidst the general excitement that prevailed.

Various reasons made the marriage of this prince a matter of imperative necessity. In the first place, the open gallantry of the young count had attracted a crowd of disreputable personages of both sexes to Versailles, and many scandalous adventures occurred within the château itself; secondly, a motive still more important in the eyes of Louis XV., originated in the circumstance of neither the marriage of the dauphin nor that of the comte de Provence having been blest with any offspring. The king began to despair of seeing any descendants in a direct line, unless indeed heaven should smile upon the wedded life of the comte d'Artois. Louis XV. disliked the princes of the blood, and the bare idea that the duc d'Orleans might one day wield his sceptre would have been worse than death.

Many alliances were proposed for the prince. Marie Josèphe, infanta of Spain, was then in her twentieth year, and consequently too old. The princess Marie-Françoise-Bénédictine-Anne-Elizabeth-Josèphe-Antonine-Laurence-Ignace-Thérèse-Gertrude-Marguerite-Rose, etc., etc., of Portugal, although younger than the first-mentioned lady, was yet considered as past the age that would have rendered her a suitable match for so youthful a bridegroom. The daughter of any of the electoral houses of Germany was not considered an eligible match, and the pride of the house of Bourbon could not stoop to so ignoble an alliance. There was no alternative left therefore, but to return to the house of Savoy, and take a sister of the comtesse de Provence. This proposal was well received by the royal family, with the exception of the dauphiness, who dreaded the united power and influence of the two sisters, if circumstances should ever direct it against herself or her wishes; and I heard from good authority, that both the imperial Marie Thérèse and her daughter made many remonstrances to the king upon the subject. «The empress,» said Louis XV., one day, «believes that things are still managed here as in the days of the marquise de Pompadour and the duc de

Choiseul. Thank heaven, I am no longer under the dominion of my friend and her pensionaries. I shall follow my own inclinations, and consult, in the marriage of my grandson, the interests of France rather than those of Austria."

The little attention paid by Louis XV. to the representations of Marie Thérèse furnished my enemies with a fresh pretext for venting their spleen. They accused me of having been bribed by the court of Turin, which ardently desired a second alliance with France. I was most unjustly accused, for I can with truth affirm, that the comte de la Marmora, ambassador from Piedmont to Paris, neither by word nor deed made any attempt to interest me in his success. The king was the first person who informed me of the contemplated marriage, and my only fault (if it could be called one) was having approved of the match.

More than one intrigue was set on foot within the château to separate the princes. Many were the attempts to sow the seeds of dissension between the dauphin and the comte d'Artois, as well as to embroil the dauphin with *monsieur*. The first attempt proved abortive, but the faction against *monsieur* succeeded so far as to excite a lasting jealousy and mistrust in the mind of Marie Antoinette. This princess was far from contemplating the marriage of the comte d'Artois with any feelings of pleasure, and when her new sister-in-law became a mother, she bewailed her own misfortune in being without children with all the feelings of a young and affectionate heart. Heaven did not, however, always deny her the boon she so ardently desired.

You will readily believe that the same anxiety prevailed upon the occasion of this approaching marriage as had existed at the unions of the dauphin and the comte de Provence, to obtain the various posts and places the ambition of different persons led them to desire in the establishment of the newly married pair. Wishing on my own part to offer the maréchale de Mirepoix a proof of my high estimation of her friendship towards me, I inquired of her whether a superior employment about the person of the comtesse d'Artois would be agreeable to her?

"Alas! my dear creature," replied the good-natured maréchale, "I am too old now to bear the toil and confinement of any service. The post of lady of honor would suit me excellently well as far as regards the income attached to it, but by no means agree with my inclinations as far as discharging its functions goes. You see I am perfectly candid with you. Listen to me; if you really wish to oblige me, you can do this—give the title to another, and bestow the pecuniary part of the engagement on me. In that manner you will be able to gratify two persons at the same time."

"I will endeavor," said I, "to meet your wishes as far as I possibly can, and you may be assured that you shall derive some advantage from this marriage."

And I kept my word by shortly after obtaining for the maréchale a sum of 50,000 livres; a most needful supply, for the poor maréchale had to re-furnish her house, her present fittings-up being no longer endurable by the eye of modish taste: she likewise received an augmentation of 20,000 livres to her pension. This proceeding was highly acceptable to her, and the king afforded his assistance with the best possible grace. He could be generous, and do things with a good grace when he pleased.

The refusal of the maréchale, which it was agreed we should keep secret, obliged me to cast my eyes upon a worthy substitute, and I at length decided upon selecting the comtesse de Forcalquier, a lady who possessed every charm which can charm and attract, joined to a faultless reputation; and, setting aside her strict intimacy with myself, the court (envious as it is) could find no fault with her. I was convinced she would not be long in acquiring an ascendency over the mind of the princess, and I was equally well assured she would never turn this influence against myself; this was a point of no small importance to me.

Madame de Forcalquier most ardently desired the place of lady of honor, without flattering herself with any hopes of obtaining it; and, not liking to ask me openly for it, she applied to the duc de Cossé. I felt some regret that she had gone to work in so circuitous a manner, and in consequence wrote her the following note:—

> « Madam, — I am aware that you are desirous of obtaining the post of lady of honor. You should not have forgotten that I am sufficiently your friend to have forwarded your wishes by every possible exertion. Why did you apply to a third person in preference to seeking my aid? I really am more than half angry with you for so doing. Believe me, my friends need not the intervention of any mediator to secure my best services. You, too, will regret not having made your first application to me, when I tell you that I was reserving for you the very place you were seeking by so circuitous a route. Yes, before you had asked it, the post of lady of honor was yours. I might have sought in vain for a person more eminently qualified for the office than yourself, or one in whom I could place more unlimited confidence. Come, my friend, I pray of you, not to thank me, who have found sufficient reward in the pleasure of obliging you, but to acknowledge the extreme kindness and alacrity with which his majesty has forwarded your wishes.
>
> « Believe me, dear madam,
>
> « Yours, very sincerely,
>
> « The Comtesse du Barry. »

Madame de Forcalquier was not long in obeying the summons contained in my note; she embraced me with the warmest gratitude and friendship, delighted at finding herself so eligibly established at court, for at that period every person regarded the comte d'Artois as the only hope of the monarchy; and blinded by the universal preference bestowed on him, the young prince flattered himself that the crown would infallibly ornament his brows. I have been told, that when first the queen's pregnancy was perceived, a general lamentation was heard throughout the castle, and all ranks united in deploring an event which removed the comte d'Artois from the immediate succession to the throne.

Up to the present moment I knew Madame de Forcalquier only as one whose many charms, both of mind and person, joined to great conversational powers and the liveliest wit, had rendered her the idol of society, and obtained for her the appellation of *Bellissima*. I knew not that this woman, so light and trifling in appearance, was capable of one of those lively and sincere attachments, which neither time nor change of fortune could destroy or diminish. She had a particular friend, a madame Boncault, the widow of a stockbroker, and she was anxious to contribute to her well-doing. With this view she solicited of me the place of lady in waiting for this much-esteemed individual. Astonished at the request I put a hasty negative on it.

« If you refuse me this fresh favor, » said madame de Forcalquier, « you will prevent me from profiting by your kindness to myself. »

« And why so ? » inquired I.

« I owe to madame Boncault, » answered she, « more than my life; I am indebted to her for tranquillity, honor, and the high estimation in which the world has been pleased to hold me. I have now an opportunity of proving my gratitude, and I beseech of you to assist my endeavors. »

« But tell me, first, » cried I, « what is the nature of this very important service you say madame de Boncault has rendered you; is it a secret, or may I hear it ? »

« Certainly, » replied the countess, « although the recital is calculated to bring the blush of shame into my cheek. Are we alone, and secure from interruption ? »

I rang and gave orders that no person should be suffered to disturb us; after which madame de Forcalquier proceeded as follows: —

« I was scarcely seventeen years old, when my parents informed me that they had disposed of my hand, and that I must prepare myself to receive a husband immediately. My sentiments were not inquired into, nor, to confess the truth, was such an investigation usual, or deemed a matter of any import. A young female of any rank has no voice in any transaction till the day which follows her marriage; until then her wishes are those of her family, and her desires bounded by the rules of worldly etiquette. I had scarcely conversed twice or thrice with my future lord, and then only for a few minutes at a time, before he conducted me to the foot of the altar, there to pronounce the solemn vow which bound me his for life. I had scarcely seen him, and barely knew whether he was agreeable or disagreeable. He was neither young nor old, handsome nor ugly, pleasing nor displeasing; just one of those persons of whom the world is principally composed; one of those men who enter or leave a saloon without the slightest curiosity being excited respecting him. I had been told that I ought to love my husband, and accordingly I taught myself to do so; but scarcely had the honeymoon waned, than my fickle partner transferred his affections from me to one of my attendants; and to such a height did his guilty passion carry him, that he quitted his home for Italy, carrying with him the unfortunate victim of his seductive arts. It was during his absence that I first became acquainted with madame Boncault; she was my own age, and equally unfortunate in her domestic life; the same tests, griefs, and a great similarity of temper and disposition soon united us in the bonds of the firmest friendship; but as she possessed a stronger and more reasonable mind than I did, she forgot her own sorrows to administer to mine. However, if the whole truth must be owned, I ought to confess that my chief consolation was derived from a young cousin of my own, who freely lavished upon me that unbounded affection I would fain have sought from my husband.

"Meanwhile, wearied of his folly, this latter returned; and, after having transferred his capricious fancies to at least half a dozen mistresses, he finished where he should have begun by attaching himself to her, who, as his wife, had every claim to his homage. Men are unaccountable creatures, but unfortunately for my husband his senses returned too late; my heart was too entirely occupied to restore him to that place he had so hastily vacated. My affections were no longer mine to bestow, but equally shared by my estimable friend madame Boncault and my young and captivating cousin. I was a bad hand at dissimulating, and M. de Forcalquier perceived enough of my sentiments to excite his jealous suspicions, and immediately removed with me to one of his estates.

« However, my cousin (whom my husband was far from suspecting) and madame Boncault accompanied me in my retreat; there myself and my admirer, more thrown together than we had been at Paris, began insensibly to lay aside the restraint we had hitherto imposed on our inclinations, and commenced a train of imprudences which would quickly have betrayed us had not friendship watched over us. The excellent madame Boncault, in order to save my reputation, took so little care to preserve her own, that M. de Forcalquier was completely caught by her manœuvre. One morning, finding me alone, he said,

« 'Madam, I am by no means satisfied with what is going on here. Your friend is wholly devoid of shame and modesty; she has been with us but one short fortnight, and is now the open and confessed mistress of your cousin.'

« 'Sir,' exclaimed I, trembling for what was to follow, 'you are, you must be mistaken: the thing is impossible. Madame Boncault is incapable—'

« 'Nonsense, madam,' replied M. de Forcalquier; 'I know what I am saying. Several things have induced me to suspect for a long while what I now assert with perfect confidence of its truth; but if you are still incredulous, behold this proof of guilt which I found just now in your cousin's chamber.'

« So saying, my husband put into my hands a letter written by my cousin evidently to some female in the château, whom he solicited to admit him that evening to the usual place of rendezvous, where he flattered himself their late misunderstanding would be cleared up.

« After having read, or, to speak more correctly, guessed at the contents of this fatal letter, I conjured my husband to replace it where he had found it, lest his guests should suspect him of having dishonorably obtained possession of their secret. He quitted me, and I hastened in search of my friend: I threw myself on my knees before her, and related all that had passed, accusing myself of the basest selfishness in having consented to save my honor at the expense of hers; then rising with renewed courage, I declared my intention of confessing my imprudence to my husband. Madame Boncault withheld me. 'Do you doubt my regard for you?' asked she; 'if indeed you do justice to my sincere attachment to you, permit me to make this one sacrifice for your safety. Leave your husband at liberty to entertain his present suspicions respecting me, but grant me one favor in your turn. Speak to your cousin; request him to quit the château, for should he remain the truth will be discovered, and then, my friend, you are lost past my endeavors to save you.'

"Less generous than madame Boncault, I consented to follow her advice. However, I have never forgotten her generous devotion; and now that the opportunity has presented itself of proving my gratitude, I beseech of you, my dear countess, to aid me in the discharge of my debt of gratitude."

As madame de Forcalquier finished speaking, I threw myself into her arms. "From this moment," cried I, "madame Boncault is my dear and esteemed *protégée;* and if I have any influence over the mind of the king, she shall be appointed lady in waiting to our young princess. Such a woman is a treasure, and I heartily thank you for having mentioned her to me."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Marriage of madame Boncault — The comte de Bourbon Busset — Marriage of comte d'Hargicourt — Disgrace of the comte de Broglie — He is replaced by M. Lemoine — The king complains of ennui — Conversations on the subject — Entry into Paris.

SPITE of the merit of madame Boncault, and the many eulogiums I bestowed on her whilst relating her history to the king, I could not immediately obtain the post madame de Forcalquier had requested for this paragon of friends. His majesty replied to me by saying, that no doubt so many virtues merited a high reward, but that ere madame Boncault could be appointed lady in waiting to his granddaughter, she must be presented at court under some other name than the one she now bore. «Oh, if that be all, sire,» replied I, «it will soon be effected. Ladies who have the good fortune to possess a rich dowry and powerful friends need never look far for a choice of husbands. Only let madame Boncault have reason to reckon upon your patronage, and she will have no lack of admirers.»

The king, always ready to oblige me, caused it to be understood throughout the château that he was desirous of seeing madame Boncault well established, as he had it in contemplation to confide to her a place of great trust. Immediately a score of suitors presented themselves; the preference was given to the comte de Bourbon Busset as the person most calculated in every respect to answer our purpose; he possessed elegant manners, an unblemished reputation, and a descent so illustrious as to be traced even to the reigning family. No sooner were the celebrations of this marriage over, than I procured the formal appointment of madame de Bourbon Busset to the post of lady in waiting to the new princess. This nomination tended greatly to increase the high opinion entertained of the judgment and discrimination of the comtesse de Forcalquier, and you may easily believe, from the friendship I bore this lady, that I fully entered into her triumph on the occasion.

When the comtesse de Bourbon Busset came to return me her acknowledgments for what I had done, she accompanied it with a request for a fresh interference on my part: this was to obtain for her husband the title of duke and peer. Accordingly I mentioned her wishes to the king, observing at the same time how very surprising it was that one so nearly related to the house of Bourbon should not have reached the honors of the ducal peerage: to which Louis XV. replied, that he had no desire to increase the number of princes of the blood, of whom there were quite sufficient of legitimate birth without placing the illegitimate upon the same footing; that Louis XIV. had been a sufficient warning of the folly of acting too indulgently towards these latter, who were only so many additional enemies to the royal authority. To all this I answered, that it was not fitting to treat the family of Bourbon Busset, however illegitimate might be its origin, as though it merely belonged to the *petite noblesse*, etc.; but my arguments were in vain, and, as the proverb says, "I talked to the wind." My friends recommended me not to press the subject, and the matter ended there. However, in order to smooth the refusal as much as possible, I procured M. de Bourbon Busset the appointment of first gentleman usher to the young prince.

The establishment of the comtesse d'Artois was now formed. M. de Chéglus, bishop of Cahors, had the post of first almoner; and strange to say, although a prelate, was a man of irreproachable virtue; he had little wit but strong sense, and was better known by his many charitable deeds than by the brilliancy of his sayings. He was eminently suited for the office now conferred on him; and those who knew him best were the least surprised to find the nomination had fallen on him.

I also procured a post in the establishment of the young couple for my sister-in-law, the comtesse d'Hargicourt. Her maiden name was Fumel, an ancient family in Guienne, and M. de Fumel, her father, was governor of the château Trompette at Bordeaux. This marriage had at first encountered many difficulties from the deadly hatred which existed in the château against us. Comte Jean, perceiving that things were going against us, applied to the king himself for assistance in the affair. Louis XV. could not endure him, but his dislike was manifested only by an uneasy timidity in his presence, and he freely granted any request that would the soonest free him from his presence. The king acted upon the same principle in the present conjuncture; he bestowed a million of livres upon the comte d'Hargicourt, that is to say, 500,000 livres to be employed in paying the debts of the comte de Fumel, and in freeing his estates from a dowry of 60,000 livres to be paid to his daughter on her marriage, with various other clearances and payments; besides this my brother-in-law, comte d'Hargicourt, was appointed captain in the prince's Swiss guards, one of the most honorable commissions that could have been conferred on him.

The comte de Crussel and the prince d'Henin were named captains of the guard to M. d'Artois. This prince d'Henin was of such diminutive stature that he was sometimes styled, by way of jest, the « prince of dwarfs, » or « the dwarf of princes. » He was the beloved nephew of the maréchale de Mirepoix, whose fondness could not supply him with the sense he so greatly needed; he was besides very profligate, and continually running into some difficulty or other by his eager pursuit after pleasure. It is related of him, that the duc de Lauragnais, wearied with seeing the prince d'Henin for ever fluttering about his mistress, mademoiselle Arnoult, drew up a consultation, to inquire whether it were possible to die of ennui: this he submitted to several physicians and celebrated lawyers, who having united in replying affirmatively, he caused the consultation with its answer to be forwarded to the prince d'Henin, warning him henceforward to cease his visits to mademoiselle Arnoult; or, in the event of her death, he would certainly be taken up as a party concerned in effecting it.

The opposite party was now more irritated than ever by the many places and employments I caused to be given either to my own friends, or to those for whom they solicited my interest. The duchesse de Grammont, flattering herself that she might now take the field against me with advantage, arrived in Paris one fine morning from Chanteloup. Those about me were full of wrath, I know not for why, at her arrival, but I explained to them, that they were mistaken in supposing madame de Grammont an exile; she had voluntarily accompanied her brother into his retreat, and when that was no longer agreeable to her she returned to Paris. However, her journey did neither good nor harm; she had many invitations to fêtes given in honor of herself, was frequently asked to dinners, balls, etc., but that was all; no person set their wits to work to reinstate her in the good graces of the king. I soon comprehended the forlorn hopes of my poor enemy, and my former animosity soon gave way to the play with which she inspired me.

About the period of the marriage of the comtesse d'Artois, an individual of some eminence fell into disgrace; this was the comte de Broglie. This gentleman, as you know, was private minister to Louis XV., intrusted for some time past with his correspondence, and affected the airs of a favorite. He solicited upon the present occasion the honor of going to meet the princess at the bridge of Beauvoisin, a request which was granted. This was not sufficient for him; he begged for a month's leave of absence, with permission to proceed to Turin: this depended on the duc d'Aiguillon, who was by no means partial to the comte de Broglie. He said to me when speaking of him,

"I feel no inclination to oblige this minister; on the contrary, he may wait long enough for what he desires as far as I am concerned."

"I fear he will be greatly offended with you," answered I.

"Oh, never mind that," replied the duke; "if he grows sullen about it, why well; if he is loud and vehement, better still; and should his anger lead him to the commission of any act of folly, depend upon it we will take advantage of it."

As I foresaw, the comte de Broglie was deeply offended, and wrote to the duc d'Aiguillon a letter full of imprudent expressions. This was exactly what this latter desired, who eagerly carried and read the paper to the different members of the council, who heard it with every expression of surprise and displeasure; the king viewed it as a piece of open rebellion, and resolved to punish the writer with his heaviest displeasure; the duc d'Aiguillon asked nothing better, and ere an hour had elapsed, the duc de la Vrillière received orders to draw up a *lettre de cachet* in which the king expressed his discontent of the comte de Broglie, deprived him of the commission he had given him to go and receive the princess of Savoy, and exiled him to Buffée, one of his estates near Angoulême.

This was a matter of great talk at the château; no one could imagine what had made the comte de Broglie conduct himself so foolishly. It was at this period that M. de Marchault said of him, when he saw him pass his house on his way to Buffée, "He has the ministry by the tail."

M. de Broglie having gone, his majesty was compelled to look out for another confidant, and raised to that eminence M. Lemoine, clerk of his closet. M. Lemoine, in an inferior station had shown himself competent to fill the highest offices in the state. Such abilities are rare. He was an excellent lawyer, admirable chancellor of exchequer, and had the king said to him, "I make thee a general," he would, the next day, have commanded armies and gained victories. Despite his merit he lived long unknown: the reason was obvious — he knew nothing of intrigue; and his wife, though pretty, was discreet; and these are not the means to advance a man at court.

Louis XV., who knew something of men when he chose to study them, was not slow in detecting the talent of Lemoine, and in consequence gave him that station in which de Broglie had been installed. No sooner had Lemoine glanced over the affairs submitted to his control, than he became master of them, as much as though they had occupied the whole of his life, and in a short time he gave to his situation an importance which it had never before reached. Unwilling, however, to incur hatred, he enveloped himself in profound mystery, so much so that nobody, with the exception of Messrs. d'Aiguillon and de Sartines, knew anything of his labors. This pleased the king, who was averse to publicity.

The duc d'Aiguillon could not conceal his joy at being freed from de Broglie, his most troublesome colleague. It was a grand point gained for him, as he could now make sure of the post of secretary-at-war, the main object of his ambition. He wished to be placed in the duc de Choiseul's position, and to effect this he redoubled his attentions towards the king, who, though not really regarding him, at length treated him as the dearest of his subjects. There are inexplicable mysteries in weak characters; obstinacy alarms them, and they yield because they hate resistance.

The king was *ennuied* to death, and became daily more dull and heavy. I saw his gloom without knowing how to disperse it, but it did not make me particularly uncomfortable. Occupied with my dear duc de Brissac I almost forgot his majesty for him: the maréchale de Mirepoix, who had more experience than I had in the affairs at Versailles, and who knew the king well, was alarmed at my negligence, and spoke to me of it.

« Do you not see, » she said, one day, « what a crisis is at hand ? »

« What crisis ? » I asked.

« The king is dying of ennui. »

« True. »

« Does it not alarm you ? » said the maréchale.

« Why should it ? »

« What makes him so ? Think well when I tell you that your mortal enemy has seized Louis XV. ; your most redoubtable enemy, *ennui!* »

"Very well; but what would you have me do?"

"You must amuse him."

"That is easier said than done."

"You are right, but it is compulsory. Believe me, kings are not moulded like other men: early disgusted with all things, they only exist in a variety of pleasures; what pleases them this evening will displease them to-morrow; they wish to be happy in a different way. Louis XV. is more kingly in this respect than any other. You must devise amusements for him."

"Alas," I replied, "how? Shall I give him a new tragedy of la Harpe's,—he will yawn; an opera of Marmontel,—he will go to sleep. Heavens! how unfortunate I am!"

"Really, my dear," replied the maréchale, "I cannot advise you; but I can quote a powerful example. In such a case madame de Pompadour would have admitted a rival near the throne."

"Madame de Pompadour was very amiable, my dear," I replied, "and I would have done so once or twice, but the part of Mother Gourdan does not suit me; I prefer that of her young ladies."

At these words the maréchale laughed, whilst I made a long grave face. At this instant comte Jean entered, and exclaimed,

"Really, ladies, you present a singular contrast. May I ask you, sister, what causes this sorrow? What ails you?"

"Oh, brother!" was my response, "the king is dying of ennui."

"That is no marvel," said my brother-in-law.

"And to rouse him," I added, "it is necessary, the maréchale says, that I must take a pretty girl by the hand, and present her to the king with these words: 'Sire, having found that you grow tired of me, I present this lady to you, that you may amuse yourself with her.'"

"That would be very fine," replied comte Jean; "it would show him that you had profited by my advice." Then, whispering in my ear, "You know, sister, I am capable of the greatest sacrifices for the king."

"What are you saying, comte Jean?" asked the maréchale, who had heard some words.

"I said to my sister," answered he, coolly, "that she ought to be executed to please the king."

"And you, too, brother," I cried.

"Yes, sister," said he, with a theatrical tone, "I see the dire necessity, and submit to it unrepiningly. Let us yield to fate, or rather, let us so act as to make it favorable to us. The king requires some amusement, and let us find him a little wench. We must take heed not to present any fine lady: no, no; by all the devils—! Excuse me, maréchale, 'tis a habit I have."

"It is nature, you mean," replied the maréchale: "the nightingale is born to sing, and you, comte Jean, were born to swear; is it not true?"

"*Morbleu*, madam, you are right."

After this conversation the maréchale went out, and comte Jean departed to arrange his plans for the king's amusement.

However, the ennui of Louis XV. was somewhat dissipated by the tidings of the various incidents which occurred at the grand entry of the dauphin and dauphiness into Paris. We learnt that the duc de Brissac, as governor of Paris, on receiving the dauphiness, said,

"Madam, you see about you two hundred thousand lovers." He was right; the princess looked like an angel. I had taken a mortal aversion to her. Alas! circumstances have too fully avenged me: this unfortunate queen loses popularity daily; her perfidious friends have sacrificed her to their interests. I pity her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Visit from a stranger — Madame de Pompadour and a Jacobinical monk — Continuation of this history — Deliverance of a state prisoner — A meeting with the stranger.

One day, at an hour at which I was not accustomed to see any person, a lady called and requested to see me; she was informed that I was visible to no person. No matter, she persisted in her request, saying that she had to speak to me upon matters of the first importance, and declared, that I should be delighted with her visit. However, my servants, accustomed to the artifices practised by persons wishing to see me for interested purposes, heeded very little the continued protestations of my strange applicant, and peremptorily refused to admit her; upon which the unknown retired with the indication of extreme anger.

Two hours afterwards a note, bearing no signature, was brought me, in which the late scene was described to me, and I was further informed, that the lady, so abruptly repulsed by my servants, had presented herself to communicate things which concerned not only my own personal safety but the welfare of all France; a frightful catastrophe was impending, which there was still time to prevent; the means of so doing were offered me, and I was conjured not to reject them. The affair, if treated with indifference, would bring on incalculable misfortunes and horrors, to which I should be the first victim. All this apparent mystery would be cleared up, and the whole affair explained, if I would repair on the following day, at one o'clock, to the Baths of Apollo. A grove of trees there was pointed out as a safe place of rendezvous, and being so very near my residence, calculated to remove any fears I might entertain of meeting a stranger, who, as the note informed me, possessed the means of entering this secluded spot. I was again conjured to be punctual to the appointed hour as I valued my life.

The mysterious and solemn tone of this singular epistle struck me with terror. Madame de Mirepoix was with me at the moment I received it. This lady had a peculiar skill in physiognomy, and the close attention she always paid to mine was frequently extremely embarrassing and disagreeable She seemed (as usual) on the present occasion to read all that was passing in my mind; however, less penetrating eyes than hers might easily have perceived, by my sudden agitation, that the paper I held in my hand contained something more than usual.

« What ails you? » asked she, with the familiarity our close intimacy warranted; « does that note bring you any bad news? »

« No, » said I; « it tells me nothing; but it leaves me ample room for much uneasiness and alarm: but, after all, it may be merely some hoax, some foolish jest played off at my expense; but judge for yourself. » So saying, I handed her the letter: when she had perused it, she said,

« Upon my word, if I were in your place, I would clear up this mystery; good advice is not so easily met with as to make it a matter of difficulty to go as far as the Baths of Apollo to seek it. It is by no means impossible but that, as this paper tells you, some great peril is hanging over you. The marquise de Pompadour, » continued madame de Mirepoix, « received more than once invitations similar to this, which she never failed to attend; and I recollect one circumstance, in which she had no cause to regret having done so: without the kind offices of one of these anonymous writers it is very possible that she might have expired heart broken, and perhaps forsaken in some state prison, instead of ending her days in the château of Versailles, honored even to the tomb by the friendship and regard of the king of France. »

I asked my friend to explain her last observation, and she replied as follows: —

"One day an anonymous billet, similar to this, was left for madame de Pompadour: it requested her to repair, at a specified hour, to the church of the Jacobins, rue Saint Honoré, in Paris, where she was promised some highly important communications. The marchioness was punctual to the rendezvous; and, as she entered the church, a Jacobite, so entirely wrapped in his capuchin as to conceal his features, approached her, took her by the hand, and conducted her to an obscure chapel; where, requesting her to sit down, he took a seat himself, and began as follows: —

"'Madam, you are about to lose the favor of the king; a party is at work to give a new mistress to the king; the lady is young, beautiful, witty, and possessed of an insatiable ambition; for the last six months she has been in the daily habit of seeing the king, unknown to you and all the court, and this has been accomplished in the following manner: her father is *valet de chambre* to his majesty, and she has an only brother, two years younger than herself, whose astonishing resemblance to her has created continual mistakes; this brother is promised the inheritance of his father's office; and, under pretext of acquiring the due initiation for future post, has been permitted every morning to attend the king's rising.

"'However, this embryo page is the sister, who comes each morning disguised in her brother's clothes. The king has had many private conversations with the designing beauty; and, seduced by her many charms of mind and person, as well as dazzled by the hidden and concealed nature of their intrigue, finds his passion for her increases from day to day. Many are the designing persons ready to profit by the transfer of the king's affections from you to this fresh favorite; and they flatter themselves the desired event is close at hand. You are to be confined by a *lettre de cachet* to the isle of St. Margaret, for the place of your exile is already chosen. The principal conspirators are two powerful noblemen, one of whom is reputed your most intimate friend. I learned all these particulars,' continued the Jacobite, 'from a young penitent, but not under the seal of confession.

This penitent is the particular friend of the female in question, who confided the secret to her, from whom I received it, accompanied by the most flattering promises of future protection and advancement. These splendid prospects excited her jealous envy, and she came here to confess the whole to me, requesting I would seek you out and inform you of the whole affair. Here is a letter she obtained unknown to her aspiring friend, which she wishes you to see, as a pledge of the veracity of her statement.' The marchioness cast her eyes over the paper held out to her by the Jacobite. It was a letter addressed by the king to his new mistress.

"You may imagine the terror of madame de Pompadour, her anxiety and impatience to return to Versailles. However, ere she quitted the friendly monk she assured him of her lasting gratitude, and begged of him to point out how she could best prove it. 'For myself,' replied he, 'I ask nothing; but if you would render me your debtor, confer the first vacant bishopric on a man whom I greatly esteem, the abbé de Barral.' You will easily suppose that the abbé de Barral had not long to wait for his preferment: as for the Jacobite the marchioness never again saw or heard anything of him. She mentioned him to the newly appointed bishop, who could not even understand to what she alluded. She related the affair, when he called heaven to witness that he knew nothing of any Jacobite either directly or indirectly."

"And how did the marchioness get rid of her rival?" inquired I of madame de Mirepoix.

"By a very simple and effective expedient. She sent for the duc de Saint Florentin, whom she requested immediately to expedite two *lettres de cachet;* one for the *valet de chambre*, who was shut up in the château de Lectoure, and the other for the daughter, whom the marchioness sent to the isle of St. Marguerite, to occupy the place she had so obligingly destined for herself."

"And now," asked I, "did these unfortunate people ever get out of prison?"

"That I know not," answered the maréchale; "and, God forgive me, for aught I ever inquired they may be there now."

"If so," cried I, "the conduct of both the king and the duc de la Vrillière is abominable and unpardonable."

"Why, bless your heart, my dear," exclaimed the maréchale, "do you expect that his majesty should recollect all the pretty women he has intrigued with, any more than the poor duke can be expected to keep a list in his memory of the different persons he has sent to a prison? He would require a prodigious recollection for such a purpose."

This unfeeling reply filled me with indignation, and redoubled the pity I already felt for the poor prisoners. I immediately despatched a note to the duc de Saint Florentin, requesting he would come to me without delay: he hastened to obey my summons. When he had heard my recital he remained silent some minutes, as though collecting his recollections upon the subject, and then replied,

"I do indeed remember that some obscure female was confined in the château of the isle Sainte Marguerite at the request of madame de Pompadour, but I cannot now say, whether at the death of the marchioness any person thought of interceding for her release."

"That is precisely what I wish to ascertain," cried I; "return to your offices, monsieur le duc, and use your best endeavors to discover whether this unfortunate girl and her parent are still in confinement; nor venture again in my presence until you have despatched the order for their deliverance: you will procure a conveyance for them from their prison to Paris at the expense of government. You understand, my lord?"

The following morning the duke brought me the desired information. He told me, that the father had been dead seven years, but the daughter still remained a prisoner: the order for restoring her to liberty had been forwarded the night preceding. I will now briefly relate the end of this mournful story.

Three weeks after this I received an early visit from the duc de la Vrillière, who came to apprize me, that my *protégée* from the isle of St. Marguerite was in my antechamber awaiting permission to offer me her grateful thanks. I desired she might instantly be admitted: her appearance shocked me; not a single trace of that beauty which had proved so fatal to its possessor now remained. She was pale, emaciated, and her countenance, on which care and confinement had imprinted the wrinkles of premature old age, was sad and dejected even to idiocy. I could have wished that madame de Pompadour, by way of punishment for her cruelty, could but have seen the object of her relentless persecution. I think she would have blushed for herself. When the poor girl entered my apartment she looked wildly around her, and casting herself at my feet, inquired with many tears to what motive she was indebted for my generous interference in her behalf. The duc de la Vrillière contemplated with the utmost *sang froid* the spectacle of a misery he had so largely contributed to. I requested of him to leave us to ourselves. I then raised my weeping *protégée*, consoled her to the best of my ability, and then requested her to give me the history of her captivity. Her story was soon told: she had been an inhabitant of the same prison for seventeen years and five months, without either seeing a human being, or hearing the sound of a human voice. Her recital made me shudder, and I promised her that henceforward her life should be rendered as happy as it had hitherto been miserable.

The king supped with me that evening. By some singular chance he was on this occasion in the happiest temper possible: he laughed, sung, joked with such unusual spirits, that I hesitated ere I disturbed a gaiety to which Louis XV. was so little prone. However, I took him aside, saying, "Sire, I have to ask atonement and reparation for a most horrible piece of injustice." After which, I proceeded to acquaint him with the distressing history of his unfortunate mistress. He appeared perfectly well to recollect the female to whom I alluded; and when I ceased speaking, he said, with a half-suppressed sigh,

"Poor creature! she has indeed been unfortunate; seventeen years and five months in prison! The duc de la Vrillière is greatly to blame in the affair; but when once

"OH, COSSÉ, HAVE I HURT YOU, HAVE I HURT YOU?"

By courtesy of Mr. David Belasco and Mrs. Leslie Carter. This scene is from David Belasco's play, *Du Barry*, played at Belasco's Theatre, New York, with Mrs. Leslie Carter as La Du Barry.

he has placed persons between four walls, he thinks he has fulfilled the whole of his duty. He should recollect, that a good memory is a necessary qualification for the situation he holds; it is indeed an imperative duty in him to think of the poor wretches he deprives of their liberty."

"And in you too, sire," interrupted I; "and it appears to me that you have lost sight of it, in the present affair, as culpably as your minister."

"I confess it, indeed," answered Louis XV.; "but the unfortunate sufferer herself was not without a due share of blame in the matter. Her presumption had greatly irritated madame de Pompadour, who punished her as she thought fit: of course I could not, consistently with the regard I professed for the marchioness, interfere in the execution of her vengeance."

"I do not agree with you," said I.

"Why, what else could I do?" asked Louis XV., with the most imperturbable calmness; "she had superior claims, was acknowledged as chief favorite, and I could not refuse her the sacrifice of a mere temporary caprice."

"Very well said," answered I, "and founded upon excellent principles; but surely it was not necessary to shut up the object of your caprice in a state prison, and, above all, to leave her there for such a length of time. However, the mischief is done; and all we have to think of is to repair it. You have now, sire, a fine opportunity of displaying your royal munificence."

"You think, then," returned Louis XV., "that I am bound to make this unhappy girl some present? Well, I will; to-morrow I will send her 1000 louis."

"A thousand louis!" exclaimed I, clasping my hands; "what, as a recompense for seventeen years' imprisonment? No, no, sire, you shall not get off so easily; you must settle on her a pension of 12,000 livres, and present her with an order for 100,000 more as an immediate supply."

"Bless me!" ejaculated the king, "why all the girls in my kingdom would go to prison for such a dowry: however, she shall have the pension; but, in truth, my treasury is exhausted."

« Then, sire, » returned I, « borrow of your friends. »

« Come, come, let us finish this business; I will give your *protégée* 4000 louis. »

« No, I cannot agree, » answered I, « to less than 5000. »

The king promised me I should have them; and, on the following day, his valet Turpigny brought me the order for the pension, and a bag, in which I found only 4000 louis. This piece of meanness did not surprise me, but it made me shrug up my shoulders, and sent me to my cabinet to take the sum deficient from my own funds. With this dowry my poor *protégée* soon found a suitable husband in the person of one of her cousins, for whom I procured a lucrative post under government. These worthy people have since well repaid me by their grateful and devoted attachment for the service I was enabled to render them. One individual of their family was, however, far from resembling them either in goodness of heart or generosity of sentiment — I allude to the brother of the lady; that same brother who formerly supplied his sister with his clothes, that she might visit the king unsuspected. Upon the incarceration of the father the son succeeded him in his office of *valet de chambre*, and acquired considerable credit at court; yet, although in the daily habit of seeing the king, he neither by word nor deed sought to obtain the deliverance of either his parent or sister. On the contrary, he suffered the former to perish in a dungeon, and allowed the latter to languish in one during more than seventeen years, and in all probability she would have ended her days without receiving the slightest mark of his recollection of his unfortunate relative. I know no trait of base selfishness more truly revolting than the one I have just related.

But this story has led me far from the subject I was previously commencing: this narrative, which I never call to mind without a feeling of pleasure, has led me away in spite of myself. Still I trust that my narrative has been sufficiently interesting to induce you to pardon the digression it has occasioned, and now I will resume the thread of my discourse.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A conspiracy — A scheme for poisoning madame du Barry — The four bottles — Letter to the duc d'Aiguillon — Advice of the ministers — Opinion of the physicians — The chancellor and lieutenant of police — Resolution of the council.

HAVE you any curiosity to learn the dénouement of the story I was telling you of my anonymous correspondent? Read what follows, then, and your wishes shall be gratified: that is, if you have patience to hear a rather long story; for I cannot promise you that mine will very speedily be completed. Let me see: where did I leave off? Oh, I recollect.

I was telling you that madame de Mirepoix urged me to repair, as I was requested, to the Baths of Apollo. I had a key which opened all the park gates; we entered the park, took the path which turns off to the left, and after having walked for about five minutes, found ourselves opposite the person we were in search of. It was a female of from thirty to forty years of age, of diminutive stature, dressed after the fashion of the *bourgeoises* of the day, but still an air of good taste was evident through the simplicity of her attire. Her countenance must once have been handsome, if one might judge by the beauty of her eyes and mouth, but she was pale, withered and already impressed with the traces of a premature old age. But her beauties, although faded, were still animated by a quick and ever-varying expression of a keen and lively wit.

Whilst I made these hasty remarks the stranger saluted me, and afterwards the maréchale de Mirepoix, with an ease of manner which perfectly surprised me. Nor did she in any other instance betray the embarrassment of a person who finds herself for the first time in the presence of persons of a rank superior to her own.

« Madam,» she said, addressing herself to me, « I trust you will pardon me for having given you the trouble of coming hither; I might have spared it you, had your people permitted me to see you when I called at your house yesterday.»

« Your invitation,» replied I, « was so pressingly enforced, that I confess my curiosity has been most keenly awakened.»

« I will immediately satisfy it,» answered she, « but what I have to say must be told to yourself alone.»

« Well, then,» said the maréchale, « I will leave you for the present: I am going to admire that fine group of Girardon»; and so saying, she quitted the walk in which I was standing.

Directly she was gone the stranger said to me, « Madam, I will explain myself without reserve or unnecessary prolixity; I beseech of you to listen attentively whilst I tell you, in the first place, that both your life and that of the king is in imminent danger.»

« Heavens!» cried I, « what do I hear?»

« That which I well know to be true,» answered the female, with a firm voice; « I repeat that your life and that of the king is in danger.»

These words, pronounced in a low, solemn voice, froze me with terror; my limbs tottered under me, and I almost sank to the ground. The stranger assisted me to a bench, offered me her arm, and when she saw me a little recovered, she continued,

« Yes, madam, a conspiracy is afoot against yourself and Louis XV. You are to be made away with out of revenge, and Louis XV. is to suffer, in the hopes of his death effecting a change in the present face of affairs.»

« And who,» inquired I, « are the conspirators?»

« The Jesuits and parliamentarians; these ancient rivals, equally persecuted by the royal government, have determined to make common cause against their mutual foe. The Jesuits flatter themselves that the dauphin inherits the kind feelings entertained by his father for their order, and the parliamentarians justly reckon upon the friendly disposition of the young prince towards the old magistracy. Both parties equally flatter themselves that a fresh reign would bring about their re-establishment, and they are impatient to accelerate so desirable an event: the conspiracy is directed by four Jesuits and the same number of the ex-members of the parliament of Paris. The remainder of the two corporations are not initiated in the secret of the enterprise. I am not able at present to give you the names of the eight conspirators, the person from whom I derive my information not having as yet confided them even to myself, but I trust ere long to obtain such a mark of confidence."

The female ceased speaking, and I remained in a state of doubt, fear, and alarm, impossible to describe. Still one thing appeared clear to me, that information so mysteriously conveyed was not deserving of belief, unless supported by more corroborating testimony. My unknown friend evidently divined all that was passing in my mind, for she observed,

"I perceive that my recital appears to you improbable; one particular which I will state may perhaps overcome your incredulity. Are you not in the habit, madam, of taking every evening *eau sucrée* mixed with a large proportion of orange-flower water?"

"I am," replied I.

"This day," continued my informant, "you will receive four bottles of orange-flower water contained in a box, bearing the usual appearances of having come from the perfumers', but it is sent by other hands, and the liquor contained in the flasks is mingled with a deadly poison—."

These last words made me tremble. "You must complete your kind offices," cried I to my visitor, "by bringing me acquainted with the person from whom you have derived your intelligence: that individual must be acquainted with the whole of the plot; and, believe me, I will not be unmindful of either of you."

"Stay one instant," replied the lady, without evincing the slightest emotion; "the man who was my informant is assuredly aware of the names of those concerned in the conspiracy, but he has charged me not to state who he is but upon certain conditions; a recommendation I shall most certainly attend to."

"Be assured," interrupted I, "that your demands shall be acceded to; you shall yourself fix the price of your entire disclosure of every fact connected with the business."

"It will not be an exorbitant one," replied the lady; "merely 600,000 francs, to be equally divided between the friend you desire to know and myself; for this sum, which is not a very large one, you may command the services of both of us. One word more, madam, and I am gone. Observe a strict silence upon all I have told you; or, if you must have a counsellor in such perilous circumstances, confide merely in some tried friend; say the duc d'Aiguillon or the chancellor, or both should you deem it necessary; but have a care how you admit a third to a participation of the affair; you could scarcely select another person without choosing one already corrupted by your enemies. It is said that they are in correspondence with even those persons immediately about the person of the king. Adieu, madam; I will see you at your own apartments the day after to-morrow, when I trust you will have ready 100,000 francs, on account of the 600,000 I have stipulated for."

So saying, she curtsied and left me, overcome with surprise. A thousand fearful ideas pressed upon my brain, and my heart sickened at the long train of gloomy images which presented themselves. I had had sufficient proofs since my elevation of the deadly hatred borne me by those whom my good fortune had rendered my enemies: yet, hitherto, my strongest apprehensions had never been directed to anything more terrible than being supplanted in the favor of the king, or being confined in my château du Lucienne. The horrible ideas of murder, poison, or assassination by any means, had never presented themselves to me. All at once I recollected the young man in the garden of the Tuileries; his predictions of my future greatness had been accomplished. He had also announced to me fearful vicissitudes, and had threatened to appear to me when these catastrophes were about to occur. Doubtless he would keep his word; now was the time for so doing, and I timidly glanced around as I caught the sound of a slight rustle among the branches, fully expecting to see my young prophet; but the figure which met my eye was that of madame de Mirepoix, who, tired of waiting, had come to rejoin me.

«What!» said she, «are you alone? I did not observe your visitor leave you. Did she vanish into air?»

«Very possibly,» answered I.

«So then,» replied the maréchale, «she proved a fairy, or some beneficent *génie*, after all?»

«If she were a spirit,» said I, «it certainly was not to the better sort she belonged.»

«Have a care,» cried the maréchale; «I have already formed a thousand conjectures as to what this woman has been telling.»

«And all your suppositions,» replied I, «would fall short of the reality. Listen, my dear maréchale,» added I, rising, and taking her arm to proceed homewards, «I have been strictly prohibited from admitting any counsellor but the duc d'Aiguillon and the chancellor; still I can have no reserves with you, who I know, from the regard you bear both to the king and myself, will advise me to the best of your power.»

As we walked towards the château, I explained to my companion the joint conspiracy of the Jesuits and ancient members of the parliament against the king's life and my own. When I had ceased speaking, she replied,

«All this is very possible; despair may conduct the Jesuits and parliamentarians to the greatest extremities; but still this mysterious female may be nothing more than an impostor. At any rate, I am anxious to learn whether the box she described has been left at your house; if so, it will be a strong corroboration, if not, a convincing proof of the falsehood of what she asserts.»

We had by this time reached the bottom of the staircase which conducted to my apartments; we ascended the stairs rapidly, and the first person I met in the anteroom was Henriette.

"Henriette," said I, "has any thing been brought for me during my absence?"

"Nothing except a box of orange-flower water from Michel the perfumer's, which I presume you ordered, madam."

A glance of mutual surprise and consternation passed between the maréchale and myself. We entered my chamber, where madame de Mirepoix opened the fatal box; it contained the four bottles exactly as had been described. We regarded each other in profound silence, not daring to communicate our reflections. However, it was requisite to take some steps, and, catching up a pen, I hastily wrote the following billet to the duc d'Aiguillon,

> "MONSIEUR LE DUC,— Whatever may be the affairs with which you are at present occupied, I pray of you to throw them aside, and hasten to me instantly upon receipt of this. Nothing can equal in importance the subject upon which I wish to see you; I cannot now explain myself fully, but prepare for news of the most horrible description, and it refers to the safety and preservation of the most valuable life in the kingdom. I cannot delay time by writing more; I can only beseech of you not to lose one moment in obeying this summons. Adieu; fail not to come and bring me back this note."

The duke hastened to me full of terror and alarm.

"Your letter has really frightened me," said he; "what can be the matter? Surely the life of his majesty is not in danger?"

"Too truly is it," answered I; "but sit down, and you shall know all the affair. The maréchale is already aware of the matter and need not withdraw."

The duke listened with extreme attention to the recital of my interview in the grove surrounding the Baths of Apollo, as well as to the account of the discourse I had held there with the strange female. I endeavoured to relate the conversation as minutely and accurately as possible, but still the duke sought further particulars. He inquired the style of countenance, dress, manner, and tone of voice possessed by the *incognita*. One might have supposed, by the closeness of his questions, that he already fancied he had identified this mysterious personage: he then examined the box, which stood on the table, and remarked, « This is a very serious affair, nor can I undertake the management of it alone; it involves a too great responsibility. Spite of the lady's assertions, I am confident the fullest confidence might be placed in all the ministers. However, I will first have a conference with M. de Saint-Florentin and the chancellor, in whose presence I will send for the lieutenant of police; and the contents of these bottles shall be immediately analyzed.»

The duke, without quitting me, wrote immediately to his two colleagues as well as to M. de Sartines, requesting this latter to repair to my apartment without delay. One of the ministers summoned by M. d'Aiguillon was not at that moment at Versailles, having left at an early hour in the morning for Paris. Neither he nor M. de Sartines could possibly be with us before eight o'clock in the evening; it was therefore agreed to adjourn our conference till their arrival. Meanwhile M. d'Aiguillon, the maréchale, and myself, remained in a state of the most cruel anxiety. The duke first blamed me for not having caused the woman to be arrested, and afterwards he confessed to the maréchale, that perhaps it was better the conspiracy should be allowed time to ripen into maturity. During this time the liquid contained in the four bottles was being decomposed: M. Quesnay, first physician, Messrs. Thiebault and Varennes, visiting physicians, M. de la Martinière, counsellor of state, surgeon to his majesty, as well as Messrs. Ducor and Prost, apothecaries to his majesty, had been collected together for this purpose by the duc d'Aiguillon.

These gentlemen came to report the termination of their experiments at the very moment when the chancellor and lieutenant of police entered the room; the duc de la Vrillière had preceded them by about five minutes; the duc d'Aiguillon requested these gentlemen to be seated. The doctors Quesnay and la Martinière were introduced, and desired to make known the result of their operations. My newly-arrived guests, who as yet understood nothing of what was going on, were struck with astonishment at hearing it said, that the four bottles of orange-flower water contained a considerable proportion of a most active poison, of which a few drops would be sufficient to cause instantaneous death. Having thus executed their commission, the medical gentlemen bowed and retired.

M. d'Aiguillon then explained to my wondering friends the horrible affair which had occasioned their being sent for so hastily. I cannot tell you what effect this disclosure produced on M. de la Vrillière or M. de Maupeou, my whole attention being fixed upon M. de Sartines. You may suppose that a lieutenant of police, particularly one who piqued himself upon knowing every thing, could not feel very much at his ease, when each word that was uttered convicted him either of incapacity or negligence. His brow became contracted, he hemmed, choked, fidgeted about, and appeared as though he would have given every thing in the world for liberty to justify himself, but etiquette forbade it, and he was only permitted to speak after the secretaries of state then present, or if called upon by either of them.

When M. d'Aiguillon had ceased speaking, the chancellor in his turn took up the conversation. M. de Maupeou was by nature cold and sarcastic, delighting in annoying any person; but, on the present occasion, the ill-nature inherent in him was still excited by the decided hatred he bore to the unfortunate M. de Sartines. He began by saying, that the conspiracy was evident, and was easily explained by the state of exasperation in which the Jesuits and parliamentarians now were; both orders looking for no other prospect of amendment in their condition than such as might arise from some sudden convulsion of the kingdom. He expressed his opinion of the necessity of instituting a rigorous inquiry into the conduct of these two bodies; and then, turning to M. de Sartines, whose cheek grew pale at the movement, he charged him to lay before the council all those particulars which he must necessarily possess as head of the police, either respecting the present plot, or relating to any of the ancient members of parliament or the order of Jesuits.

This was a dagger to the heart of M. de Sartines, who in vain sought to frame a suitable reply: but what could he say? He did not in reality possess any of the information for which he had received credit, and after many awkward endeavours at explaining himself, he was compelled frankly to confess, that he knew not a word more of the conspiracy than he had just then heard.

It was now the turn of M. de la Vrillèire to speak. He also would fain have attacked the unfortunate lieutenant of police; but, whether M. de Maupeou thought that his own correction had been sufficiently strong, or whether he begrudged any other person interfering with his vengeance upon his personal foe, he abruptly interrupted the tirade of M. de la Vrillèire, by observing, that a conspiracy conducted by only eight persons might very possibly escape the eye of the police; but, furnished as it now was with so many circumstances and particulars, it was impossible that the plot should any longer defy their vigilant researches.

M. d'Aiguillon fully concurred in this observation, and M. de Sartines, recovered in some measure from his first alarm, promised every thing they could desire; and it was finally arranged that the police should this night use every precautionary measure in Paris, and that the officers of the guard should receive orders to redouble their zeal and activity in watching the château; and that when the unknown female called again on me, she should be conducted by madame de Mirepoix to the duc d'Aiguillon, who would interrogate her closely.

These measures decided on, the council broke up, and I went to receive the king, who was this evening to do me the favour of taking his supper in my apartments.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Conclusion of this affair — A letter from the *incognita* — Her examination — Arrest of Cabert the Swiss — He dies in the Bastille of poison — Madame Lorimer is arrested and poisoned — The innocence of the Jesuits acknowledged — Madame de Mirepoix and the 100,000 francs — Forgetfulness on the part of the lieutenant of police — A visit from comte Jean — Madame de Mirepoix.

M. de Sartines did not sleep on his post, but his researches were fruitless; and, on the following day, three successive messengers came to announce to us that they had as yet made no discovery. The day passed without bringing any fresh intelligence, and our anxiety increased daily. At length arrived the period fixed for the visit of the *incognita*. I awaited the coming of this female with an impatience impossible to describe. About mid-day a note was brought me; I instantly recognized the writing as that of my mysterious friend, and hastily breaking the seal, read as follows:

"Madam,—I must entreat your pardon for breaking the appointment for to-day, imperative duties still detain me in Paris.

"Since our last interview I have been unceasingly occupied in endeavouring to discover the names of the eight persons of whom I spoke to you, and, I am sorry to say, I have but partially succeeded. The person who has hitherto furnished me with my information obstinately refuses to state who are the parliamentarians concerned in the conspiracy. I am, however, enabled to forward you the names of the four Jesuits, with some few particulars relating to these worthy fathers.

"The Jesuits in question are Messrs. Corbin, Berthier, Cerulti, and Dumas; the first of whom was employed in the education of the dauphin, the second and the third are sufficiently known; as for the fourth, he is a bold and enterprising Parisian, capable of conceiving and executing the most daring schemes. Whilst the order remained in possession of power he had no opportunity of displaying his extraordinary talents, and consequently he obtained but a trifling reputation; but since its banishment he has become its firmest support and principal hope. All the treasures of the brotherhood are at his disposal, and I learn, that the day before yesterday he received a considerable sum from Lyons.

«This intrepid and daring spirit is the very soul of the conspiracy; he it is who conceived the plan and set the whole machine in action. It would be effectually extinguished could we but once secure him, but this is by no means an easy task; he has no fixed abode; never sleeps two nights following in the same home; one day he may be found in one part of Paris and the next at the very opposite corner; he changes his manner of dress as frequently as he does his abodes.

«I shall have the honour of seeing you to-morrow or the day after at furthest. Meanwhile lay aside all uneasiness for his majesty's safety: I pledge you my word he is for the present in perfect security. The execution of the plot is still deferred for the want of a Damiens sufficiently sanguinary to undertake the task.

«Deign, madam, to accept the assurance of my sincere devotion, and believe that I will neglect no opportunity of affording you proofs of it. «Yours, madam, etc., etc.»

I immediately communicated this letter to the duc d'Aiguillon, who convoked a fresh meeting of the persons who had been present on the preceding day. It was at first deliberated whether or not to arrest the whole body of Jesuits then in Paris, but this, although the advice of M. d'Aiguillon, was by no means approved of by the chancellor. M. de Sartines and M. de la Vrillière were for carrying the idea into execution, but the objections of M. de Maupeou were too powerful to be overruled, and the scheme was for the present abandoned. The chancellor maintained that the other conspirators, warned of their own danger by the seizure of their friends, would either escape the vengeance of the laws by flight or by close confinement in their houses; he greatly dreaded as it was, that his foes, the parliamentarians, would avoid the punishment he longed to inflict on them. Indeed, in his estimation, it seemed as though every measure would be anticipated so long as the female, who seemed so intimately acquainted with their design, was at liberty; and this last opinion was unanimously concurred in.

All the delays greatly irritated me, and rendered my impatience to witness the termination of the affair greater than it had ever been. The stranger had promised to make her appearance on the following day; it passed away, however, without my hearing anything of her. On the day following she came; I immediately sent to apprize M. d'Aiguillon, who, with M. de la Vrillière and the chancellor, entered my apartments ere the lady had had time to commence the subject upon which she was there to speak. This unexpected appearance did not seem to disconcert her in the least, nor did her *sang-froid* and ordinary assurance in any degree fail her. She reproached me for having intrusted the secret to so many persons, but her reproof was uttered without bitterness, and merely as if she feared lest my indiscretion might compromise our safety. She was overwhelmed with questions, and the chancellor interrogated her with the keenest curiosity; but to all the inquiries put to her she replied with a readiness and candour which surprised the whole party. She was desired to give the names of those engaged in the conspiracy, as well as of him who first informed her of it. She answered that her own name was Lorimer, that she was a widow living upon her own property. As for the man, her informant, he was a Swiss, named Cabert, of about thirty years of age, and had long been her intimate friend: however, the embarrassed tone with which she pronounced these last words left room for the suspicion, that he had been something dearer to her than a friend. She was then urged to give up the names of the four parliamentarians, but she protested that she had not yet been able to prevail on Cabert to confide them to her, that she was compelled to use the utmost circumspection in her attempts at discovering the facts already disclosed, but flattered herself she should yet succeed in gaining a full and unreserved disclosure. M. de Maupeou encouraged her, by every possible argument, to neglect no means of arriving at so important a discovery.

The examination over, and the 100,000 francs she had demanded given to her, she retired, but followed at a distance by a number of spies, who were commissioned to watch her slightest movement.

Cabert, the Swiss, was arrested in a furnished lodging he occupied in rue Saint Roch, and sent without delay to Versailles, where, as before, M. d'Aiguillon with his two colleagues waited in my study to receive and question the prisoner. Cabert was a young and handsome man, whose countenance bore evident marks of a dissolute and profligate life. He confessed, without any difficulty, that his only means of gaining a livelihood were derived from the generosity of a female friend, but when he was pressed upon the subject of the conspiracy, he no longer replied with the same candour, but merely answered in short and impatient negatives the many questions put to him, accompanied with fervent protestations of innocence; adding, that implacable enemies had fabricated the whole story, only that they might have an opportunity of wreaking their vengeance, by implicating him in it.

« Accuse not your enemies, » cried I, for the first time mingling in the conversation, « but rather blame your benefactress; it is madame Lorimer who has denounced you, and far from intending to harm you by so doing, she purposes dividing with you the 100,000 livres which are to reward her disclosures. »

I easily found, by the frowning looks directed towards me by the three gentlemen present, that I had been guilty of great imprudence in saying so much; but Cabert, wringing his hands, uttered, with the most despairing accent,

« I am lost! and most horribly has the unfortunate woman avenged herself. »

« What would you insinuate? »

« That I am the victim of an enraged woman, » replied he.

He afterwards explained, that he had been the lover of madame Lorimer, but had become wearied of her, and left her in consequence; that she had violently resented this conduct; and, after having in vain sought to move him by prayers and supplications, had tried the most horrible threats and menaces. « I ought not indeed, » continued he, « to have despised these threats, for well I knew the fiendlike malice of the wretched creature, and dearly do I pay for my imprudence, by falling into the pit she has dug for me."

In vain we endeavoured to induce him to hold a different language. He persisted with determined obstinacy in his first statement; continually protesting his own innocence, and loading the author of his woes with bitter imprecations. It was deemed impossible to allow this man to go at large; accordingly M. de la Vrillière issued a *lettre de cachet*, which sent him that night to seek a lodging in the Bastille. It was afterwards deemed advisable to put him to the torture, but the agonies of the rack wrung from him no deviation from, or contradiction of, what he had previously alleged.

The affair had now become mysterious and inexplicable. However, a speedy termination was most imperatively called for; if it were permitted to become generally known, it could not fail of reaching the ears of the king, whose health was daily declining; and M. de Quesnay had assured us, that in his present languid state, the shock produced by news so alarming, might cause his instantaneous death.

Whilst we remained in uncertainty as to our mode of proceeding in the business, Cabert, the Swiss, three days after his admission into the Bastille, expired in the most violent convulsions. His body was opened, but no trace of poison could be discovered: our suspicions were however awakened, and what followed confirmed them.

Madame Lorimer was arrested. She protested that she had been actuated by no feelings of enmity against her unfortunate lover, whom she had certainly reproached for having expended the money she furnished him with in the society of other females, and to the anger which arose between herself and Cabert on the occasion could she alone ascribe his infamous calumnies respecting her; that, for her own part, she had never ceased to love him, and, as far as she knew, that feeling was reciprocal; and, in betraying the conspiracy, her principal desire, next to the anxious hope of preserving the king, was to make the fortune of Cabert. She was confined in the Bastille, but she did not long remain within its walls; for at the end of a fortnight she died of an inflammatory disease. Her death was marked by no convulsions, but the traces of poison were evident.

These two violent deaths occurring so immediately one after another (as not the slightest doubt existed that Cabert had likewise died of poison) threw the ministers into a sad state of perplexity. But to whom could they impute the double crime unless to some accomplice, who dreaded what the unhappy prisoners might be tempted to reveal. Yet the conduct of the Jesuitical priests stated by madame Lorimer to be the principal ringleaders in the plot, although exposed to the most rigorous scrutiny, offered not the slightest grounds for suspicion. Neither did their letters (which were all intercepted at the various post-houses) give any indication of a treasonable correspondence.

M. de Sartines caused the private papers of the suspected parties to be opened during their owners' absence, without discovering anything which could compromise their character. I am speaking, however, of the fathers Corbin, Berthier, and Cerulti, for all our efforts could not trace father Dumas throughout all Paris. Nor was the innocence of the parliamentarians less evident; they vented their hatred against the ministry, and particularly against M. de Maupeou, in pamphlets, couplets, and epigrams, both in French and Latin, but they had no idea of conspiracies or plots.

And thus terminated an affair, which had caused so much alarm, and which continued for a considerable period to engage the attention of ministers. How was the mystery to be cleared up? The poisoned orange-flower water, and the sudden deaths of the two prisoners, were facts difficult to reconcile with the no less undeniable innocence of the three accused Jesuits. The whole business was to me an incomprehensible mass of confusion, in which incidents the most horrible were mingled. At last we agreed that the best and only thing to be done was to consign the affair to oblivion; but there were circumstances which did not so easily depart from the recollection of my excellent friend, the maréchale de Mirepoix. « My dear soul, » said she to me one day, « have you ever inquired what became of the 100,000 livres given to madame Lorimer? she had no time to employ them in any way before her imprisonment in the Bastille. You ought to inquire into what hands they have fallen. »

I fully comprehended the drift of this question, which I put to M. de Sartines the first time I saw him.

« Bless me, » exclaimed he, « you remind me that these 100,000 livres have been lying in a drawer in my office. But I have such a terrible memory. »

« Happily, » replied I, « I have a friend whose memory is as good as yours seems defective upon such occasions. It will not be wise to permit such a sum to remain uselessly in your office: at the same time I need not point out that you, by your conduct in the late affair, have by no means earned a right to them. »

He attempted to justify himself; but, interrupting him, I exclaimed, « My good friend, you have set up a reputation of your own creating and inventing; and well it is you took the office upon yourself for no one else would have done it for you; but you perceive how frail have been its foundations; for the moment you are compelled to stand upon your own resources you faint, and are easily overcome. »

He endeavoured to make a joke of the affair, but indeed it seemed to accord as ill with his natural inclination as did the restitution of the 100,000 livres. However, he brought them to me the following day, and as I was expecting the arrival of madame de Mirepoix, I placed them in a porcelain vase which stood upon my chimney-piece. Unfortunately for the maréchale, comte Jean presented himself before she did. He came to inform me, that my husband (of whose quitting Toulouse I had forgotten to tell you) had again arrived in Paris. I did not disguise the vexation which this piece of intelligence excited in me.

« And wherefore has comte Guillaume returned to Paris? » inquired I, angrily.

« Because he is afraid. »

« Afraid of what? » replied I.

« Of being murdered, » answered comte Jean: « it is a most horrible and authentic story. Imagine to yourself the dangers of his situation: some brigands, who have a design on his life, have written him an anonymous billet, in which they protest they will certainly murder him, unless he deposits 50,000 livres in a certain place. You may suppose his terror; money he had none, neither was his credit sufficiently good to enable him to borrow any. As a last and only chance, he threw himself into a carriage, and hastened, tremblingly, to implore your assistance. »

« And I am quite certain you will not withhold yours from him, » answered I.

« You are perfectly right, » cried he, « but unfortunately just now I have not a single crown I can call my own; so that it rests with you alone, my dearest sister, to save the life of this hapless comte du Barry. »

« I am extremely distressed, my dear brother-in-law, » replied I, « that I am just as poor, and as unable to afford the necessary aid as yourself; my purse is quite empty. »

« Faith, my dear sister-in-law, I am not surprised at that if you convert a china vase into a receptacle for your bank notes. »

Saying this, he drew a bundle of notes from the hiding-place in which I had deposited them. « Do you know, » continued comte Jean, « I really think we shall find money enough here. » He began to count them; and when he had finished he said, « My dear sister, neither your husband nor myself wish to importune you, or put you to any inconvenience, therefore you shall merely oblige him with the loan of these 50,000 livres to extricate him from his present peril; they shall be faithfully and quickly restored to you, and a note of hand given you for that purpose if you desire it. » So saying, he divided the money into two parts, replaced one in the vase, and pocketed the other.

I was very indignant at the cool impudence with which this was done, and my patience had well nigh forsaken me: however, I restrained myself; and I was happy enough that I could so far conquer myself. My reproaches would not have induced comte Jean to give me back my money, and would only have roused his violence; which, when once excited, found vent in language so vehement and energetic, that I did not desire to hear any more of it than I could help. At these moments he selected not the politest expressions, but those which were the strongest: and besides, such was the ungovernable nature of comte Jean's temper, that once roused, he would have treated the king himself with as little consideration as he did me. Still, he never deliberately insulted me, nor did he compose those insulting verses respecting me, which were printed as his, in "*Les Anecdotes sur Madame du Barry.*" This would have been an indignity I would quickly have caused him to repent having offered.

"Well," inquired I, "are you very glad to see your brother in Paris?"

"No, 'pon my soul!" returned he; "but since he is here, we must do the best we can with him; he was very anxious to see his sister-in-law and niece. He says the former is ugly as sin, and the latter almost as handsome as you."

"Very gallant," replied I; "but tell me, comte Jean, does this elegant compliment proceed from my husband or yourself?"

We were just then interrupted by the arrival of the maréchale, and comte Jean retired.

"Well, my dear," she began, "have you seen M. de Sartines, and did you speak to him respecting those 100,000 livres?"

"Oh, yes," replied I, "he gave them back to me; but I have already had half of them stolen from me."

"By comte Jean, I'll engage," cried she. "Upon my word, that man is a perfect spendthrift, a prodigal; who, if you do not take great care, will certainly ruin you. And what will you do with the remaining 50,000 livres, my dear friend; where will you place them?"

"In your hands, my dear maréchale; 'tis his majesty's command."

« To that command,» answered she, « I must perforce submit »; and, taking the bundle of notes, she continued, « Assure his majesty that it will ever be my greatest pride and pleasure to obey his slightest wish. My respect for his orders can only be equalled by my tender friendship for her who is the bearer of the royal mandate.» Then, deliberately putting the money in her pocket, she exclaimed, « You must own that comte Jean is a great rogue.»

CHAPTER XXXIX.

My alarms — An *élève* of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* — Comte Jean endeavours to direct the king's ideas — A supper at Trianon — Table talk — The king is seized with illness — His conversation with me — The joiner's daughter and the small-pox — My despair — Conduct of La Martinière the surgeon.

I HAD occasionally some unaccountable whims and caprices. Among other follies I took it into my head to become jealous of the duchesse de Cossé, under the idea that the duke would return to her, and that I should no longer possess his affections. Now the cause of this extravagant conduct was the firmness with which madame de Cossé refused all overtures to visit me, and I had really become so spoiled and petted, that I could not be brought to understand the reasonableness of the duchesse de Cossé refusing to sanction her rival by her presence.

You may perceive that I had not carried my heroic projects with regard to madame de Cossé into execution. Upon these occasions, the person most to be pitied was the duke, whom I made answerable for the dignified and virtuous conduct of his wife. My injustice drove him nearly to despair, and he used every kind and sensible argument to convince me of my error, as though it had been possible for one so headstrong and misguided as myself to listen to or comprehend the language of reason. I replied to his tender and beseeching epistles by every cutting and mortifying remark; in a word, all common sense appeared to have forsaken me. Our quarrel was strongly suspected by part of the court; but the extreme prudence and forbearance of M. de Cossé prevented their suppositions from ever obtaining any confirmation. But this was not the only subject I had for annoyance. On the one hand, my emissaries informed me that the king still continued to visit the baroness de New—k, although with every appearance of caution and mystery, by the assistance and connivance of the duc de Duras, who had given me his solemn promise never again to meddle with the affair. The *gouvernante* of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* furnished me likewise with a long account of the many visits paid by his majesty to her establishment. The fact was, the king could not be satisfied without a continual variety, and his passion, which ultimately destroyed him, appeared to have come on only as he advanced in years.

All these things created in my mind an extreme agitation and an alarm, and, improbable as the thing appeared even to myself, there were moments when I trembled lest I should be supplanted either by the baroness or some fresh object of the king's caprice; and again a cold dread stole over me as I anticipated the probability of the health of Louis XV. falling a sacrifice to the irregularity of his life. It was well known throughout the château, that La Martinière, the king's surgeon, had strongly recommended a very temperate course of life, as essentially necessary to recruit his constitution, wasted by so many excesses, and had even gone so far as to recommend his no longer having a mistress; this the courtiers construed into a prohibition against his possessing a friend of any other sex than his own; for my own part, I experienced very slight apprehensions of being dismissed, for I well knew that Louis XV. reckoned too much on my society to permit my leaving the court, and if one, the more tender, part of our union were dissolved, etiquette could no longer object to my presence. Still the advice of La Martinière was far from giving me a reason for congratulation; but these minor grievances were soon to be swallowed up in one fatal catastrophe, by which the honours and pleasures of Versailles were for ever torn from me.

The *madame* of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, fearing that some of the subordinate members of that establishment might bring me intimation of what was going on there without her cognizance, came one day to apprize me that his majesty had fallen desperately in love with a young orphan of high birth, whom chance had conducted within the walls of her harem; that to an extraordinary share of beauty, Julie (for that was the name of my rival) united the most insatiate ambition; her aims were directed to reducing the king into a state of the most absolute bondage, «and he,» said madame, «bids fair to become all that the designing girl would have him.»

Julie feigned the most violent love for her royal admirer, nay she did not hesitate to carry her language and caresses far beyond the strict rules of decency; her manners were those of one accustomed to the most polished society, whilst her expressions were peculiarly adapted to please one who, like the king, had a peculiar relish for every thing that was indecent or incorrect. His majesty either visited her daily or sent for her to the château. I heard likewise from M. d'Aiguillon, that the king had recently given orders that the three uncles and two brothers of Julie should be raised by rapid promotion to the highest military rank; at the same time the grand almoner informed me he had received his majesty's express command to appoint a cousin of the young lady to the first vacant bishopric.

These various reports threw me into a train of painful and uneasy reflections. Louis XV. had never before bestowed such marks of favour upon any *élève* of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs*, and the intrigue had attained this height with the most inconceivable rapidity. Chamilly interrupted my meditations, by presenting himself with an account of his having been commissioned by his majesty to cause a most splendid suit of diamonds to be prepared for mademoiselle Julie, the king not considering any jewels of Paris worthy her acceptance. By way of a finish to all this, I learned that two ladies, one of whom was a duchess, had openly boasted at Versailles of their relationship to Julie. This was a more decided corroborative than all the rest. Courtiers of either sex are skilful judges of the shiftings of the wind of court favour, and I deemed it high time to summon my brother-in-law to my assistance, as well as to urge him to exert his utmost energies to support my tottering power.

My communication tormented comte Jean as much as it did me; he proposed several means of combating this rising inclination on the part of Louis XV. I assented to whatever he suggested, and we set to work with an eagerness, increased on my part by a species of gloomy presentiment, which subsequent events but too fatally confirmed. The maréchale de Mirepoix, who, from being on good terms with every person, was sure to be aware of all that was going on, spoke to me also of this rival who was springing up in obscurity and retirement; and it was from the same source I learned what I have told you of the two ladies of the court. She advised me not to abandon myself to a blind confidence, and this opinion was strengthened when I related all I had gathered upon the subject.

« You may justly apprehend,» said she, « that Julie will instil some of her bold and fearless nature into the king, and should she presume to put herself in competition with you, victory would in all probability incline to the side of the last comer »; and I felt but too truly that the maréchale spoke with truth.

A few days after this, the king being alone with me, comte Jean entered. After the usual salutations, he exclaimed, « I have just seen a most lovely creature. »

« Who is she ? » inquired his majesty, hastily.

« No high-born dame,» answered comte Jean, « but the daughter of a cabinet-maker at Versailles; I think I never beheld such matchless beauty.»

« Always excepting present company,» replied the king.

« Assuredly,» rejoined my brother-in-law, « but, sire, the beauteous object of whom I speak is a nymph in grace, a sylph in airy lightness, and an angel in feature.»

« Comte Jean seems deeply smitten indeed, madam,» exclaimed Louis XV., turning towards me.

« Not I indeed,» replied my brother-in-law, « my lovemaking days are over.»

« Oh! oh!» cried the king, smiling, « *fructus belli.* »

« What does your majesty say ? » inquired I.

« Nay, let the comte explain,» cried Louis XV.

« The king observed, my dear sister,» answered comte Jean, « that ladies — but, in fact, I can neither explain the observation, nor was it intended for you — so let it rest.»

He continued for some time to jest with comte Jean upon his supposed passion for the fair daughter of the cabinet-maker; and the king, whilst affecting the utmost indifference, took every pains to obtain the fullest particulars as to where this peerless beauty might be found.

When my brother-in-law and myself were alone, he said to me, « I played my part famously, did I not? How eagerly the bait was swallowed!»

« Explain yourself,» said I.

« My good sister, what I have said respecting this perfection of loveliness is no fiction, neither have I at all exaggerated either her perfections or her beauty, and I trust by her aid we shall obliterate from the king's mind every recollection of the syren of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs.*»

« Heaven grant it,» exclaimed I.

« My dear sister,» replied comte Jean, « heaven has nothing to do with such things.»

Alas! he was mistaken, and Providence only employed the present occasion as a means of causing us to be precipitated into the very abyss of ruin we had dug for others. On the following morning, Chamilly came to me to inquire whether it was my pleasure that the present scheme should be carried into execution.»

« Yes, yes,» answered I eagerly, « by all means, the more we direct the inclinations of the king for the present, the better for him and for us likewise.»

Armed with my consent, Chamilly dispatched to the unhappy girl that *madame*, whose skill in such delicate commissions had never been known to fail. Not that in the present instance any great bribes were requisite, but it was necessary to employ some agent whose specious reasoning and oily tongue should have power to vanquish the virtuous reluctance of the victim herself, as well as to obtain a promise of strict silence from her family

They were soon induced to listen to their artful temptress; and the daughter, dazzled by the glittering prospect held out to her, was induced to accompany *madame* back to Trianon, where the king was to sup, in company with the ducs d'Aiguillon and de Richelieu, the prince de Soubise, the ducs de Cossé, de Duras, and de Noailles, mesdames de Mirepoix, de Forcalquier, de Flaracourt, and myself; my brother-in-law and Chon were also of the party, although not among the number of those who sat down to supper. Their presence was merely to keep up my spirits, and with a view to divert me from dwelling on the presumed infidelity of the king.

We had promised ourselves a most delightful evening, and had all come with the expectation of finding considerable amusement in watching the countenances and conduct of those who were not aware of the real state of the game, whilst such as were admitted into my entire confidence, were sanguine in their hopes and expectations of employing the simple beauty of the maiden of Versailles to crush the aspiring views of my haughty rival of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs.* This was, indeed, the point at which I aimed, and my further intention was to request the king to portion off mademoiselle Julie, so that she might be ever removed from again crossing my path.

Meanwhile, by way of passing the tedious hours, I went to satisfy my curiosity respecting those charms of which comte Jean had spoken so highly. I found the object of so many conjectures possessed of an uncommon share of beauty, set off, on the present occasion, by every aid that a splendid and elaborate toilette could impart; her features were perfect, her form tall and symmetrical, her hair was in the richest style of luxuriance; but by way of drawback to so many advantages, both her hands and feet were large and coarse. I had expected to have found her timid, yet exulting, but she seemed languid and dejected even to indisposition. I attributed the lassitude and heaviness which hung over her to some natural regrets for sacrificing some youthful passion at the shrine of ambition; but I was far from guessing the truth. Had I but suspected the real cause! but I contented myself with a silent scrutiny, and did not (as I should have done) question her on the subject, but passed on to the saloon, where the guests were already assembled. The evening passed away most delightfully; the maréchale de Mirepoix excelled herself in keeping up a continual flow of lively conversation. Never had messieurs de Cossé and de Richelieu appeared to equal advantage. The king laughed heartily at the many humorous tales told, and his gaiety was the more excited, from his believing that I was in utter ignorance of his infidelity. The champagne was passed freely round the table, till all was one burst of hilarious mirth. A thousand different topics were started, and dismissed only to give way to fresh subjects more piquant than the preceding.

The king, in a fit of good humour, began to relate his adventures with madame de Grammont; but here you must pardon me, my friend, for so entirely did his majesty give the reins to his inclination for a plain style of language, that, although excess of prudery formed no part of the character of any of the ladies assembled, we were compelled to sit with our eyes fixed upon our plate or glass, not daring to meet the glance of those near us. I have little doubt but that Louis XV. indulged himself to this extent by a kind of mental vow to settle the affair with his confessor at the earliest opportunity.

We were still at table when the clock struck two hours past midnight.

« Bless me! so late? » inquired the king.

« Indeed, sire, » replied the maréchale de Mirepoix, « your agreeable society drives all recollection of time away. »

« Then 'tis but fit I should furnish you all with memory enough to recollect what is necessary for your own health. Come, my friends, morning will soon call us to our different cares, so away to your pillows. »

So saying, the king bade us a friendly farewell, and retired with the ducs de Duras and de Noailles. We remained after his majesty, and retiring into the great saloon, threw ourselves without any ceremony upon the different couches and ottomans.

"For my own part," said the prince de Soubise, "I shall not think of separating from so agreeable a party till daylight warns me hence."

"The first beams of morn will soon shine through these windows," replied M. d'Aiguillon.

"We can already perceive the brightest rays of Aurora reflected in the sparkling eyes around us," exclaimed M. de Cossé.

"A truce with your gallantry, gentlemen," replied madame de Mirepoix, "at my age I can only believe myself capable of reflecting the last rays of the setting sun."

"Hush!" interrupted madame de Forcalquier, "you forget we are at Versailles, where age is never thought of, but where, like our gracious sovereign, all are young."

"Come, ladies," said madame de Flaracourt, "let us retire; I for one, plead guilty of being in need of repose."

"No, no!" replied the duc de Richelieu, "let us employ the remaining hours in pleasing and social converse," and with a tremulous voice he began that charming trio in "Selina and Azor," "*Veillons mes soeurs.*" We joined chorus with him, and the echoes of the palace of Louis XV. resounded with the mirthful strain. This burst of noisy mirth did not last long, and we relapsed into increased taciturnity, spite of our endeavours to keep up a general conversation. We were all fatigued, though none but madame de Flaracourt would confess the fact. Tired nature called loudly for repose, and we were each compelled to seek it in the different apartments assigned us. The duc d'Aiguillon alone was compelled, by the duties of his office, to return to Versailles.

Upon entering my chamber I found my brother-in-law there, in the most violent fit of ill humour, that the king (who was in fact ignorant of his being at Trianon) had not invited him to supper. As I have before told you, comte Jean was no favourite with his majesty, and as I had displayed no wish for his company, Louis XV. had gladly profited by my indifference to omit him upon the present occasion. I endeavoured to justify the king, without succeeding, however, in appeasing comte Jean, who very unceremoniously consigned us all to the care and company of a certain old gentleman, whose territory is supposed to lie beneath «the round globe which we inhabit.»

«I have to thank you,» replied I, «for a very flattering mode of saying 'good night.'»

«Perhaps,» answered comte Jean roughly, «you would prefer — »

«Nothing from your lips if you please, my polite brother,» cried I, interrupting him, «nothing you will say in your present humour can be at all to my taste.»

Chon interfered between us, and effected a reconciliation, which I was the more willing to listen to, that I might enjoy that sleep my weary eye-lids craved for. Scarcely was my head on my pillow, than I fell into a profound sleep: could I but have anticipated to what I should awake! It was eleven o'clock on the following morning when an immense noise of some person entering my chamber, aroused me from the sweet slumbers I was still buried in. Vexed at the disturbance, I inquired, in a peevish tone, «Who is there?»

«'Tis I, my sister,» replied Chon, «M. de Chamilly is here, anxious to speak with you upon a matter of great importance.»

Chamilly, who was close behind mademoiselle du Barry, begged to be admitted.

«What is the matter, Chamilly?» cried I, «and what do you want? Is mademoiselle Julie to set off into the country immediately?»

«Alas! madam,» replied Chamilly, «his majesty is extremely ill.»

These words completely roused me, and raising myself on my arm, I eagerly repeated,

«Ill! of what does he complain?»

«Of general and universal pain and suffering,» replied Chamilly.

«And the female who was here last night, how is she?»

«Nearly as bad, madam; she arose this morning complaining of illness and languor, which increased so rapidly, that she was compelled to be carried to one of the nearest beds, where she now is."

All this tormented me to the greatest degree, and I dismissed Chamilly for the purpose of rising, although I had no distinct idea of what it would be most desirable to say or do. My sister-in-law, with more self-possession, suggested the propriety of summoning Bordeu, my physician; a proposal which I at once concurred in, more especially when she informed me, that La Martinière was already sent for, and hourly expected.

"I trust," said I, "that Bouvart knows nothing of this, for I neither approve of him as a man or a doctor."

The fact was, I should have trembled for my own power, had both Bouvart and La Martinière got the king into their hands. With La Martinière I knew very well I was no favourite; yet it was impossible to prevent his attendance; the king would never have fancied a prescription in which he did not concur.

Meanwhile I proceeded with my toilette as rapidly as possible, that I might, by visiting the king, satisfy myself of the nature of his malady. Ere I had finished dressing, my brother-in-law, who had likewise been aroused by the mention of his majesty's illness, entered my chamber with a gloomy look; he already saw the greatness of the danger which threatened us, he had entirely forgotten our quarrel of the preceding evening, but his temper was by no means improved by the present state of things. We had no need of explaining ourselves by words, and he continued walking up and down the room with his arms folded and his eyes fixed on the floor, till we were joined by the maréchale de Mirepoix and the comtesse de Forcalquier. Madame de Flaracourt had taken her departure at an early hour, either ignorant of what had occurred or with the intention of being prepared for whatever might happen.

As yet, it was but little in the power of any person to predict the coming blow. "The king is ill," said each of us as we met. "The king is ill," was the morning salutation of the ducs de Richelieu, de Noailles, de Duras, and de Cossé. The prince de Soubise had followed the example of madame de Flaracourt, and had quitted Trianon; it seemed as though the hour for defections were already arrived. A summons now arrived from his majesty who wished to see me. I lost not a moment in repairing to his apartment, where I found him in bed, apparently in much pain and uneasiness. He received me tenderly, took my hands in his, and kissed them; then exclaimed,

« I feel more indisposed than I can describe, a weight seems pressing on my chest, and universal languor appears to chain my faculties both of body and mind. I should like to see La Martinière.»

« And would you not likewise wish to have the advice of Bordeu ? »

« Yes,» said he, « let both come, they are both clever men, and I have full confidence in their skill. But do you imagine that my present illness will be of a serious nature ? »

« By no means, sire,» returned I, « merely temporary, I trust and believe.»

« Perhaps I took more wine than agreed with me last evening; but where is the maréchale ? »

« In my chamber with madame de Forcalquier.»

« And the prince de Soubise ? »

« He has taken flight,» replied I, laughing.

« I suppose so,» returned Louis XV., « he could not bear a long absence from Paris; company he must have.»

« In that respect he resembles you, sire, for you generally consider company as a necessary good.»

He smiled, and then closing his eyes remained for some minutes silent and motionless, after a while he said,

« My head is very heavy, so farewell, my sweet friend, I will endeavour to get some sleep.»

« Sleep, sire! » said I, « and may it prove as healthful and refreshing as I pray it may.»

So saying, I glided out of the room and returned to my friends, I found madame de Mirepoix and the duc de Cossé waiting for me in the anteroom.

« How is the king ? » inquired they both in a breath.

« Better than I expected,» I replied, « but he is desirous of sleeping.»

« So much the worse,» observed the duc de Cossé; « I should have thought better of his case had he been more wakeful.»

« Are you aware of the most imperative step for you to take?» inquired the maréchale de Mirepoix.

« No,» said I, « what is it?»

« To keep his majesty at Trianon,» replied she; « it will be far better for you that the present illness should take its course at Trianon rather than at Versailles.»

« I second that advice,» cried the duc de Richelieu, who just then entered the room; « yes, yes, as madame de Mirepoix wisely observes, this is the place for the king to be ill in.»

« But,» exclaimed I, « must we not be guided by the physicians' advice?»

« Do you make sure of Bordeu,» said the duke, « and I will speak to La Martinière.»

M. de Cossé took me aside, and assured me that I might rely upon him in life or death. When we had conversed together for some minutes, I besought of him to leave the place as early as possible; « Take madame de Forcalquier with you,» said I, « your presence just now at Trianon would be too much commented upon.»

He made some difficulties in obeying me, but I insisted and he went. After his departure, the duc de Richelieu the maréchale and myself walked together in the garden. Our walk was so directed that we could see through the colonnade every person who arrived up the avenue. We spoke but little, and an indescribable feeling of solemnity was mingled with the few words which passed, when, all at once, our attention was attracted by the sight of comte Jean, who rushed towards me in a state of frenzy.

« Accursed day,» cried he, stopping when he saw us, « that wretched girl from Versailles has brought the smallpox with her.»

At this fatal news I heaved a deep sigh and fainted. I was carried under the portico, while the poor maréchale, scarcely more in her senses than myself, stood over me weeping like a child, while every endeavour was being made to restore me to life. Bordeu, who chanced to be at Versailles, arrived, and supposing it was on my account he had been summoned, hastened to my assistance. The duc de Richelieu and comte Jean informed him of all that had passed, upon which he requested to see the unfortunate female immediately; while he was conducted thither, I remained alone with the maréchale and Henriette, who had come to Trianon with my suite. My first impulse upon regaining the use of my senses, was to throw myself in the arms of the maréchale.

« What will become of me ? » exclaimed I, weeping, « if the king should take this fatal malady, he will never survive it. »

« Let us hope for the best, » answered madame de Mirepoix; « it would be encouraging grief to believe a misfortune, which we have at present no reason to suspect. »

Comte Jean now rejoined us, accompanied by Bordeu and the duc de Richelieu; their countenances were gloomy and dejected. The miserable victim of ambition had the symptoms of the most malignant sort of small-pox; this was a finishing stroke to my previous alarms. However, comte Jean whispered in my ear, « Bordeu will arrange that the king shall remain here. »

This assurance restored me to something like composure; but these hopes were speedily dissipated by the arrival of La Martinière.

« What is the matter ? » inquired he, « is the king very ill ? »

« That remains for you to decide »; replied the duc de Richelieu; « but however it may be, madame du Barry entreats of you not to think of removing the king to Versailles. »

« And why so ? » asked La Martinière, with his accustomed abruptness. « His majesty would be much better there than here. »

« He can nowhere be better than at Trianon, monsieur, » said I.

« That, madam,» answered La Martinière, « is the only point upon which you must excuse my consulting you, unless, indeed, you are armed with a physician's diploma.»

« Monsieur la Martinière,» cried the duc de Richelieu, « you might employ more gentle language when speaking to a lady.»

« Was I sent for hither,» inquired the angry physician, « to go through a course of politeness ?»

For my own part I felt the utmost dread, I scarcely knew of what. Bordeu, seeing my consternation, hastened to interfere, by saying,

« At any rate, monsieur la Martinière, you will not alarm the king needlessly.»

« Nor lull him into a false security,» answered the determined La Martinière. « But what is his malady ? have you seen him, doctor Bordeu ?»

« Not yet.»

« Then why do we linger here ? Your servant, ladies and gentlemen.»

The medical men then departed, accompanied by the duc de Richelieu.

CHAPTER XL.

La Martinière causes the king to be removed to Versailles — The young prophet appears again to madame du Barry — Prediction respecting cardinal de Richelieu — The joiner's daughter requests to see madame du Barry — Madame de Mirepoix and the 50,000 francs — A *soirée* in the salon of madame du Barry.

WE CONTINUED for some minutes silently gazing on the retreating figures of La Martinière and his companions.

« Come, » said the maréchale, « let us return to the house »; saying which, she supported herself by the arm of comte Jean, whilst I mechanically followed her example, and sadly and sorrowfully we bent our steps beneath the splendid colonnade which formed the entrance to the mansion.

When I reached my chamber, I found mademoiselle du Barry there, still ignorant of the alarming news I had just learned. She earnestly pressed me to return to bed, but this I refused; for my burning anxiety to learn every particular relative to the king would have prevented my sleeping. How different was the style of our present conversation to that of the preceding evening; no sound of gaiety was heard; hushed alike were the witty repartee, and the approving laugh which followed it. Now, we spoke but by fits and starts, with eye and ear on the watch to catch the slightest sound, whilst the most trifling noise, or the opening of a door, made us start with trepidation and alarm. The time appeared to drag on to an interminable length.

At last the duc de Richelieu made his appearance.

« Well, my friends, » said he, « the king is to be removed to Versailles, spite of your wishes, madam, spite of his own royal inclination, and against mine, likewise.

La Martinière has thundered forth his edict, and poor Bordeu opposed him in vain. His majesty, who expresses a wish to remain here, stated his pleasure to La Martinière.

"'Sire,' answered the obstinate physician, 'it cannot be. You are too ill to be permitted to take your choice in the matter, and to the château at Versailles you must be removed.'

"'Your words imply my being dangerously indisposed,' said the king, inquiringly.

"'Your majesty is sufficiently ill to justify every precaution, and to require our best cares. You must return to the château; Trianon is not healthy; you will be much better at Versailles.'

"'Upon my word, doctor,' replied the king, 'your words are far from consoling; there must be danger, then, in my present sickness?'

"'There would be considerable danger were you to remain here, whilst it is very probable you may avoid any chance of it by following my directions with regard to an immediate removal to Versailles.'

"'I feel but little disposed for the journey,' said his majesty.

"'Still, your majesty must be removed, there is an absolute necessity for it, and I take all the responsibility upon myself.'

"What do you think of this determination, Bordeu?'

"'I think, sire, that you may be permitted to please yourself.'

"'You hear that, La Martinière?'

"'Yes, sire, and your majesty heard my opinion likewise.' Then turning towards Bordeu, 'Sir,' exclaimed he, 'I call upon you in my capacity of head physician to the king, to state your opinion in writing, and to abide by the consequences of it; you who are not one of his majesty's physicians.'

"At this direct appeal, your doctor, driven to extremities, adopted either the wise or cowardly resolution of maintaining a strict silence. The king, who was awaiting his reply with much impatience, perceiving his reluctance to speak, turned towards the duc de Duras, who was in attendance upon him, and said, ‘Let them take me when and where my head physician advises.’ »

At this recital I shed fresh tears. The duke afterwards told us that when La Martinière had quitted his majesty, he went to ascertain the condition of the wretched girl who had introduced all this uneasiness among us, and after having attentively examined her, he exclaimed, « She is past all hope, God only knows what the consequences may be.» This gloomy prognostic added still more to my distress, and whilst those around me strove to communicate fresh hopes and confidence to my tortured mind, I remained in a state too depressed and dejected to admit one, even one ray of consolation.

The king was removed from Trianon, followed by all the persons belonging to his suite. The maréchale insisted upon deferring her departure till I quitted the place. We set out a few minutes after his majesty, and my coachman had orders to observe the same slow pace at which the royal carriage travelled. Scarcely had we reached Versailles, when mechanically directing my eyes towards the iron gate leading to the garden, a sudden paleness overspread my countenance, and a cry of terror escaped me, for, leaning against the gate in question, I perceived that singular being, who, after having foretold my elevation, had engaged to present himself before me, when a sudden reverse was about to overtake me. This unexpected fulfilment of his promise threw me into the most cruel agitation, and I could not refrain from explaining the cause of my alarm to those who were with me. No sooner had I made myself understood than comte Jean stopped the carriage, and jumped out with the intention of questioning this mysterious visitor. We waited with extreme impatience the return of my brother-in-law, but he came back alone, nor had he been able to discover the least trace of the object of his search. In vain had he employed the two footmen from behind the carriage to examine the different avenues by which he might have retired. Nothing could be heard of him, and I remained, more than ever, convinced that the entire fulfilment of the prophecy was at hand, and that the fatal hour would shortly strike, which would witness my fall from all my pomp and greatness. We continued our route slowly and silently; the maréchale accompanied me to the door of my apartment, where I bade her adieu, spite of her wish to remain with me; but even her society was now fatiguing to me, and I longed to be alone with merely my own family.

My two sisters-in-law, the wife of comte d'Hargicourt and that of my nephew, were speedily assembled to talk over with me the events of the last twelve hours. I threw myself upon my bed in a state of mental and bodily fatigue, impossible to describe. I strove in vain to collect my ideas, and arm myself for what I well saw was approaching, and the exact appearance of the singular predicter of my destiny prepared me for the rapid accomplishing of all that had been promised.

Louis XV., during this fatal illness, was placed under the care of Bordeu and Lemonnier. No particularly alarming symptoms appeared during that day, and we remained in a state of suspense more difficult to bear than even the most dreadful certainty. As soon as the king felt himself sufficiently recovered from the fatigues of his removal he requested to see me. After bestowing on me the most gratifying marks of the sincerest attachment, he said,

« I am well punished, my dear countess, for my inconstancy towards you, but forgive me. I pray and believe that, however my fancy may wander, my heart is all your own. »

« Is that quite true ? » said I, smiling. « Have you not some reservations ? Does not a noble female in the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* come in for a share as well as the baroness de New—k ? »

The king pressed my hand, and replied,

« You must not believe all those idle tales; I met the baroness by chance, and, for a time, I thought her pretty. As for the other, if she renders you in any way uneasy, let her be married at once, and sent where we need never see her again. »

« This is, indeed, the language of sincerity,» cried I, « and from this moment I shall have the fullest confidence in you.»

The conversation was carried on for a long while in this strain. The physicians had made so light of the complaint, that the king believed his illness to be merely of a temporary nature, and his gaiety and good spirits returned almost to their natural height. He inquired after madame de Mirepoix, and whether my sisters-in-law were uneasy respecting his state of health. You may imagine that my reply was worded with all the caution necessary to keep him in profound ignorance as to his real condition. When I returned to my apartment I found Bordeu there, who appeared quite at a loss what to say respecting the king's malady, the symptoms still remained too uncertain to warrant any person in calling it the small-pox.

« And should it prove that horrible complaint ? » inquired I.

« There would, in that case, be considerable danger,» replied Bordeu, not without extreme embarrassment.

« Perhaps even to the extinction of all hope ? » asked I.

« God alone can tell,» returned Bordeu.

« I understand,» interrupted I, quickly, « and, spite of the mystery with which you would fain conceal the extent of his majesty's danger, I know, and venture to assert, that you consider him already as dead.»

« Have a care, madam,» exclaimed Bordeu, « how you admit such an idea, and still more of proclaiming it. I pledge you my word that I do not consider the king is in danger; I have seen many cures equally extraordinary with his.»

I shook my head in token of disbelief. I had uttered what I firmly supposed the truth, and the sight of my evil genius in the person of the prophet who had awaited my return to Versailles, turned the encouraging words of Bordeu into a cold, heavy chill, which struck to my heart. Bordeu quitted me to resume his attendance upon the king. After him came the duc d'Aiguillon, whose features bore the visible marks of care and disquiet. He met me with the utmost tenderness and concern, asked of me the very smallest details of the disastrous events of the morning. I concealed nothing from him, and he listened to my recital with the most lively interest; and the account of the apparition of the wonderful being who seemed destined to follow me throughout my career was not the least interesting part of our conversation.

« There are, » said the duke, « many very extraordinary things in this life, reason questions them, philosophy laughs at them, and yet it is impossible to deny that there are various hidden causes, or sudden inspirations, which have the greatest effect upon our destiny. As a proof, I will relate to you the following circumstance. You are aware, » continued the duke, « that the cardinal de Richelieu, the author of our good fortune, spite of the superiority of his mind, believed in judicial astrology. When his own immediate line became extinct by the unexpected death of his family and relatives, he wished to ascertain what would be the fate of those children belonging to his sister, whom he had adopted as the successors of his name, arms, and fortune. The planets were consulted, and the answer received was, that two centuries from the day on which Providence had so highly elevated himself, the family, upon whom rested all his hopes of perpetuating his name, should fail entirely in its male descent. You see that the duc de Fronsac has only one child, an infant not many days old. I also have but one, and these two feeble branches seem but little calculated to falsify the prediction. Judge, my dear countess, how great must be my paternal anxiety! »

This relation on the part of the duc d'Aiguillon was but ill calculated to restore my drooping spirits, and although I had no reason for concluding that the astrologer had spoken prophetically to the grand cardinal, I was not the less inclined to believe, with increased confidence, the predictions uttered respecting myself by my inexplicable visitor of the morning. My ever kind friend, the duchesse d'Aiguillon, was not long ere she too made her appearance, with the view, and in the hope of consoling me. I could not resist her earnest endeavours to rouse me from my grief, and a grateful sense of her goodness obliged me to deck my features with at least the semblance of cheerfulness. Every hour fresh accounts of the king's health were brought me, of a most encouraging nature; by these bulletins one might naturally suppose him rapidly recovering, and we all began to smile at our folly in having been so soon alarmed; in fact, my spirits rose in proportion as those about me appeared full of fresh confidence, and the mysterious visit of my evil genius gradually faded from my recollection.

In this manner the day passed away. I visited the king from time to time, and he, although evidently much oppressed and indisposed, conversed with me without any painful effort. His affection for me seemed to gain fresh strength as his bodily vigour declined, and the fervent attachment he expressed for me, at a time when self might reasonably have been expected to hold possession of his mind, filled me with regret at not being able more fully to return so much tenderness. In the evening I wished to be alone, the maréchale de Mirepoix had sent to request a private interview, and I awaited her arrival in my chamber, whilst an immense concourse of visitors filled my salons. The king's danger was not yet sufficiently decided for the courtiers to abandon me, and the chances continued too strongly in my favour to warrant any one of them in withdrawing from me their usual attentions. Comte Jean, however, presented himself before me, spite of the orders I had given to exclude every person but the maréchale.

« My dear sister, » cried he, as he entered, « Chamilly has just told me that he has received the royal command to have Julie married off without delay; now this is a piece of delicacy towards yourself on the part of the king for which you owe him many thanks. But I have another communication to make you, of a less pleasing nature. The unfortunate girl who has been left at Trianon, has called incessantly for you the whole of this day; she asserts that she has matters of importance to communicate to you. »

Whatever surprise I experienced at this intelligence, it was impossible it could be otherwise than true, for was it likely that, at a time like the present, comte Jean would attempt to impose such a tale upon me.

« What would you have me do ? » asked I of my brother-in-law.

« Hark ye, sister, » replied he, « we are both of us in a very critical situation just now, and should spare no endeavour to extricate ourselves from it. Very possibly this girl may be in possession of facts more important than you at present conceive possible; the earnestness with which she perseveres in her desire of seeing you, and her repeated prayers to those around her to beg your attendance, proves that it is something more than the mere whim of a sick person, and in your place, I should not hesitate to comply with her wishes. »

« And how could we do so ? » said I.

« To-night, » returned he, « when all your guests have retired, and Versailles is in a manner deserted, I will fetch you; we have keys which open the various gates in the park, and walking through which, and the gardens, we can reach Trianon unobserved. No person will be aware of our excursion, and we shall return with the same caution with which we went. We will, after our visit, cause our clothes to be burnt, take a bath, and use every possible precaution to purify ourselves from all chance of infection. When that is done you may venture into the apartment of his majesty, even if that malady which at present hangs over him should turn out to be the small-pox. »

I thought but little of the consequences of our scheme, or of the personal danger I incurred, and I promised my brother-in-law that I would hold myself in readiness to accompany him. We then conversed together upon the state of the king, and, what you will have some difficulty in crediting, not one word escaped either of us relative to our future plans or prospects; still it was the point to which the thoughts of comte Jean must naturally have turned

We were interrupted in our *tête-à-tête* by the arrival of the maréchale, whose exactitude I could not but admire. Comte Jean, having hastily paid his compliments, left us together.

« Well, my dear countess, » said she, taking my hand with a friendly pressure, « and how goes on the dear invalid ? »

« Better, I hope, » replied I, « and indeed, this illness, at first so alarming to me, seems rather calculated to allay my former fears and anxieties by affording the king calm and impartial reflection; the result of it is that my dreaded rival of the *Parc-aux-Cerfs* is dismissed. »

« I am delighted to hear this, » replied madame de Mirepoix, « but, my dear soul, let me caution you against too implicitly trusting these deceitful appearances, to-morrow may destroy these flattering hopes, and the next day — »

« Indeed ! » cried I, interrupting her, « the physicians answer for his recovery. »

« And suppose they should chance to be mistaken, » returned my cautious friend, « what then ? But, my dear countess, my regard for you compels me to speak out, and to warn you of reposing in tranquillity when you ought to be acting. Do not deceive yourself, leave nothing to chance; and if you have any favour to ask of the king, lose no time in so doing while yet you have the opportunity. »

« And what favour would you advise me to ask ? » said I.

« You do not understand me, then ? » exclaimed the maréchale, « I say that it is imperatively necessary for you to accept whatever the king may feel disposed to offer you as a future provision, and as affording you the means of passing the remainder of your days in ease and tranquillity. What would become of you in case of the worst ? Your numerous creditors would besiege you with a rapacity, still further excited by the support they would receive from court. You look at me with surprise because I speak the language of truth; be a reasonable creature I implore of you once in your life, and do not thus sacrifice the interests of your life to a romantic disregard of self. »

I could not feel offended with the maréchale for addressing me thus, but I could not help fancying the moment was ill chosen, and unable to frame an answer to my mind, I remained silent. Mistaken as to the cause of my taciturnity, she continued,

« Come, I am well pleased to see you thus reflecting upon what I have said; but lose no time, strike the iron while it is hot. Do as I have recommended either to-night or early to-morrow; possibly, after that time it may be too late. May I venture also to remind you of your friends, my dear countess. I am in great trouble just now, and I trust you will not refuse to obtain for me, from his majesty, a favour of which I stand in the utmost need — 50,000 francs would come very seasonably; I have lost that sum at cards, and must pay it, but how I know not. »

« Let not that distress you, » said I, « for I can relieve you of that difficulty until the king's convalescence enables him to undertake the pleasing office of assisting your wishes. M. de Laborde has orders to honour all my drafts upon him, I will therefore draw for the sum you require. » So saying, I hastily scrawled upon a little tumbled piece of paper those magic words, which had power to unlock the strong coffers of a court banker. The maréchale embraced me several times with the utmost vivacity.

« You are my guardian angel, » cried she, « you save me from despair. But, tell me, my generous friend, do you think M. de Laborde will make any difficulty? »

« Why, » said I, « should you suppose it possible he will do so? »

« Oh, merely on account of present circumstances. »

« What circumstances? »

« The illness — no, I mean the indisposition of his majesty. »

« He is an excellent man, » said I, « and I doubt not but he will act nobly and honourably. »

« If we could but procure his majesty's signature — »

« But that is quite impossible to-night. »

« I know it is, and, therefore, I will tell you what I think of doing. Perhaps, if I were to set out for Paris immediately, I might be able to present this cheque before Laborde is acquainted with our misfortune. It is not late, so farewell, my dearest countess. I shall return to-morrow before you are up, but do not forget what I have said to you; and remember, that under any circumstances, the king should secure you a safe and ample independence. If his death finds you well provided for, you will still have a court, friends, relatives, partisans, in a word, the means of gratifying every inclination. Be guided by me, and follow my advice."

And after this lesson of practical morality, the maréchale quitted me to hurry to Paris; and I, wearied and heartsick, flew to my crowded salons as a remedy against the gloomy ideas her conversation had given rise to.

On this evening my guests were more numerous and brilliant than usual, for no person entertaining the least suspicion of the king's danger, all vied with each other in evincing, by their presence, the desire they felt of expressing their regard for me. My friends, acquaintances, people whom I scarcely knew at all, were collected together in my drawing-rooms; this large assemblage of joyous and cheerful faces, drove away for a moment all the gloom which had hung over me. I even forgot the morning's visitor, and if the health of the king were at all alluded to, it was only *en passant*. It seemed a generally understood thing not to believe him seriously ill; in fact, to deny all possibility of such a thing being the case. Thus all went on as usual, scandal, slander, epigrams, *jeux d'esprits*, all the lively nonsense usually circulated upon such occasions, went round, and were laughed at and admired according to the tastes of those to whom they were addressed.

Could a stranger have seen us, so careless, thoughtless, and gay, he would have been far from suspecting that we were upon the eve of a catastrophe which must change the whole face of affairs in France. For my own part, my spirits rose to a height with the giddy crowd around me, and in levity and folly, I really believe I exceeded them.

At a late hour my rooms were at length forsaken, and I retired to my chamber, where, having dismissed my other attendants, I remained alone (as was frequently my custom) with my faithful Henriette, whom I caused to exchange my evening dress for a dark robe, which I covered with a large Spanish mantle I had never before worn, and thus equipped, I waited the arrival of comte Jean. Henriette, surprised at these preparations, pressed me with so many questions, that at last I explained my whole purpose to her. The attached creature exerted all her eloquence to point out the dangers of the enterprise, which she implored of me to abandon, but I refused to listen to her remonstrances, and she ceased urging me further, only protesting she should await my return with the most lively impatience.

At length, comte Jean appeared, armed with a small sword-stick and pistols in his pocket, with every other precaution necessary for undertaking so perilous an adventure. We descended into the garden with many smiles at the singular figures we made, but no sooner were we in the open air, than the sight of the clear heavens sparkling with stars, the cool still night, the vast walks lined with statues, which resembled a troop of white phantoms, the gentle waving of the branches as the evening breeze stirred their leaves, with that feeling of awe and solemnity generally attendant upon the midnight hour, awoke in our minds ideas more suitable to our situation. We ceased speaking, and walked slowly down the walk past the basin of the dragon, in order, by crossing the park, to reach the château de Trianon.

Fortune favoured us, for we met only one guard in the park; this man having recognised us as we drew near, saluted us, and was about to retire, when my brother-in-law called him back and desired him to take our key, and open with it the nearest gates to the place which we wished to go to. He also commanded him to await our return. The soldier was accustomed to these nocturnal excursions even on the part of the most scrupulous and correct gentlemen and ladies of the court.

He, therefore, assured us of his punctuality, and opened for us a great iron gate, which it would have cost my brother-in-law much trouble to have turned upon its hinges.

The nearer we approached the end of our journey, the more fully did our minds become impressed with new and painful disquietudes. At length, we reached the place of our destination.

My brother-in-law desired he might be announced but said nothing of who I was. We were expected, for a Swiss belonging to the palace conducted us to a chamber at one end of the château, where, stretched on a bed of loathsome disease, was the creature who, but a few hours before, had been deemed worthy the embraces of a powerful monarch. Beside her were an elderly female, her mother, and an aged priest, who had been likewise summoned by the unfortunate girl, and her brother, a young man of about twenty-four years of age, with an eye of fire, and a frame of Herculean power. He was sitting with his back turned towards the door; the mother, half reclining on the bed, held in her hand a handkerchief steeped in her tears, while the ecclesiastic read prayers to them from a book which he held. A nurse, whom we had not before perceived, answered the call of the Swiss, and inquired of him what he wanted.

«I want nothing, myself,» answered he, «but here is comte Jean du Barry with a lady from Versailles; they say they come at the request of mademoiselle Anne.»

We were now on the threshold of the door, and the nurse, crossing the chamber, spoke to the mother, who hastily rose, while the priest discontinued his prayers. The mother looked at us, then whispered some words to her daughter. The patient stirred in her bed, and the nurse returning to us, said to comte Jean that he might approach the bed of the invalid.

He advanced and I followed him, although the noisome effluvia with which the air was loaded produced a sickness I scarcely could surmount. The gloom of the place was still further increased by the dim light of two wax candles placed in a nook of the room.

The priest, having recognised my brother-in-law, and suspecting doubtless who I was, was preparing to withdraw, but the sick girl made signs for him to remain. He obeyed, but removing to a distance, he took his place beside the young man, who, understanding only that strangers had arrived, rose from his seat and displayed his tall gigantic height to the fullest advantage.

CHAPTER XLI.

Interview with the joiner's daughter — Consultation of the physicians respecting the king — The small-pox declares itself — The comte de Muy — The princesses — Extreme sensibility of madame de Mirepoix — The king is kept in ignorance of his real condition — The archbishop of Paris visits Versailles.

The gloomy and mysterious air scattered over the group which presented itself to our eyes filled us with desponding thoughts. There appeared throughout the party a kind of concentrated grief and silent despair which struck us with terror. We remained motionless in the same spot without any persons quitting their fixed attitude to offer us a seat. After some minutes of a deep silence, which I durst not interrupt any more than comte Jean, whose accustomed hardihood seemed effectually checked, the suffering girl raised herself in her bed, and in a hollow voice exclaimed,

« Comtesse du Barry, what brings you here? »

The sound of her hoarse and grating voice made me start, spite of myself.

« My poor child, » answered I, tenderly, « I come to see you at your request. »

« Yes, yes, » replied she, bursting into a frightful fit of laughter, « I wished to see you to thank you for my dishonour, and for the perdition into which you have involved me. »

« My daughter, » said the priest, approaching her, « is this what you promised me? »

« And what did I promise to God when I vowed to hold myself chaste and spotless? Perjured wretch that I am, I have sold my honour for paltry gold; wheedled by the deceitful flattery of that man who stands before me, I joined his infamous companion in the path of guilt and shame. But the just vengeance of heaven has overtaken me, and I am rightly punished."

Whether this language was the result of a previously studied lesson I know not, but it was ill-calculated to raise my failing spirits.

"My child, my beloved child!" exclaimed the weeping mother, "fear not, God is merciful and will accept your sincere abhorrence of your fault. I have this day offered in your name a fine wax taper to your patroness, St. Anne, who will, no doubt, intercede for you."

"No, no!" replied the unhappy girl; "there is no longer any hope for me; and the torments I now suffer are but the preludes to those which I am doomed to endure everlastingly."

This singular scene almost convulsed me with agitation. I seized the arm of my brother-in-law with the intention of escaping from so miserable a spot; the invalid perceived my design and vehemently exclaimed,

"Stay, comtesse du Barry; I have not yet finished with you, I have not yet announced the full revenge I shall take for your share in my present hopeless condition; your infamous exaltation draws to a close, the same poison which is destroying me, circulates in the veins of him you have too long governed; but your reign is at an end. He will soon quit his earthly crown, and my hand strikes the blow which sends him hence. But still, dying a victim to a cruel and loathsome complaint, I go to my grave triumphing over my haughty rival, for I shall die the last possessor of the king's affections. Heavens! what agonies are these?" cried she; then, after a short silence, she continued, extending to me her arms hideous with the leprous blotches of her disgusting malady, "yes, you have been my destruction; your accursed example led me to sell myself for the wages of infamy, and to the villainous artifices of the man who brought you here I owe all my sufferings. I am dying more young, more beautiful, more beloved than you; I am hurried to an untimely end. God of heaven! die! did I say die? I cannot, will not — Mother, save your child! — Brother, help me, save me!"

"My daughter, my darling child!" cried the despairing mother, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly.

"My dearest sister Anne, what can I do for you?" inquired the young man, whose stern features were melted into mere womanish tenderness.

"Daughter," interrupted the priest, "God is good; he can and will forgive you if you heartily turn to him, with a sincere desire to atone for your fault."

All this took place in less time than it has taken in the recital. My brother-in-law seemed completely deprived of his usual self-possession by this burst of frightful raving; his feet appeared rooted to the floor of the chamber; his colour changed from white to red, and a cold perspiration covered his brows. For my own part, I was moved beyond description; but my faculties seemed spell-bound, and when I strove to speak, my tongue cleaved to my mouth.

The delirium of poor Anne continued for some time to find utterance, either by convulsive gesticulation, half-uttered expressions, and, occasionally, loud and vehement imprecations. At length, quite exhausted with her violence, which required all the efforts of her brother to subdue by positive force, she sunk into a state of insensibility. The priest, on his knees, implored in a loud voice the mercy of Providence for the king and all his subjects. Had any person conceived the design of working on my fears so far as to induce me to abandon a life at court, they could not have succeeded more entirely than by exhibiting to me the scene I have been describing. Had not many contending ideas enabled me to bear up under all I saw and heard, my senses must have forsaken me; under common circumstances, the aspect of the brother alone would have terrified me exceedingly; and even now, I cannot recollect without a shudder, the looks of dark and sinister meaning he alternately directed at me and at comte Jean. At this moment, the doctor who had the charge of the unhappy girl arrived. The warmth and eagerness of manner with which he addressed me directly he perceived my presence, might have proved to all around that I was not the hateful creature I had been described. This well-timed interruption restored me to the use of my faculties, and repulsing the well-meant attentions of my medical friend, I exclaimed, « Do not heed me, I conjure you; I am only temporarily indisposed. But hasten to that poor girl whose dangerous state requires all your care. »

My brother-in-law, recovering himself by a strong effort, profited by the present opportunity to remove me into another apartment, the pure air of which contributed to cool my fevered brain; but my trembling limbs refused to support me, and it was necessary to apply strong restoratives ere I was sufficiently recovered to quit the fatal spot. At Trianon, as well as at Versailles, I was considered absolute mistress; those of the royal household, who were aware of my being at the former, earnestly solicited me to retire to the chamber I had occupied on the preceding night, but to this arrangement the comte and myself were equally opposed. A sedan chair was therefore procured, in which I was rapidly transported back to Versailles.

You may easily conceive in what a state I arrived there. My good Henriette was greatly alarmed, and immediately summoned Bordeu, who, not venturing to bleed me, contented himself with administering some cordials which revived me in some degree. But the events of the last few hours seemed indelibly fixed in my mind; and I heard, almost with indifference, the bulletin issued respecting the state of the king's health during the fatal night which had just passed. One object alone engrossed my thoughts; my eyes seemed still to behold the miserable girl stretched on her dying bed, whose ravings of despair and threatening words yet rung in my ears, and produced a fresh chill of horror, as with painful tenacity my mind dwelt upon them to the utter exclusion of every other consideration. The unfortunate creature expired on the third day, a victim to the rapid progress of the most virulent species of small-pox. She died more calmly and resigned than I had seen her. For my own part, I freely pardoned her injustice towards myself, and sincerely forgive the priest if he (as I have been told) excited her bitterness against me.

The severe shock I had experienced might have terminated fatally for me, had not my thoughts been compelled to rouse themselves for the contemplation of the alarming prospect before me. It was more than four o'clock in the morning when I returned to the château, and at nine I rose again without having obtained the least repose. The king had inquired for me several times. I instantly went to him, and my languid frame, pale countenance and heavy eyes, all which he took as the consequences of my concern for his indisposition, appeared greatly to affect him; and he sought to comfort me by the assurance of his being considerably better. This was far from being true, but he was far from suspecting the nature of the malady to which his frame was about to become a prey. The physicians had now pronounced with certainty on the subject, nor was it possible to make any mystery of it with me, who had seen Anne on her sick-bed.

In common with all who knew the real nature of the complaint, I sought to conceal it from the king, and in this deception the physicians themselves concurred. In the course of the morning a consultation took place; when called upon for their opinion, each of them endeavoured to evade a direct answer, disguising the name of his majesty's disease under the appellation of a cutaneous eruption, chicken-pox, etc., etc., none daring to give it its true denomination. Bordeu and Lemonnier pursued this cautious plan, but La Martinière, who had first of all pronounced his decision on the subject, impatient of so much circumlocution on the part of those around him, could no longer repress his indignation.

« How is this, gentlemen! » exclaimed he, « is science at a standstill with you? Surely, you cannot be in any doubt on the subject of the king's illness. His majesty has the small-pox, with a complication of other diseases equally dangerous, and I look upon him as a dead man. »

« Monsieur de la Martinière,» cried the duc de Duras, who, in quality of his office of first gentleman of the bedchamber, was present at this conference, « allow me to remind you that you are expressing yourself very imprudently.»

« Duc de Duras,» replied the abrupt La Martinière, « my business is not to flatter the king, but to tell him the truth with regard to his health. None of the medical gentlemen present can deny the truth of what I have asserted; they are all of my opinion, although I alone have the courage to act with that candour which my sense of honour dictates.»

The unbroken silence preserved by those who heard this address, clearly proved the truth of all La Martinière advanced. The duc de Duras was but too fully convinced of the justice of his opinion.

« The king is then past all hope,» repeated he, « and what remains to be done?»

« To watch over him, and administer every aid and relief which art suggests,» was the brief reply of La Martinière.

The different physicians, when separately questioned, hesitated no longer to express their concurrence in the opinion that his majesty's case was entirely hopeless, unless, indeed, some crisis, which human foresight could not anticipate, should arise in his favour.

This opinion changed the moral face of the château. The duc de Duras, who had not previously suspected even the existence of danger, began to feel how weighty a burthen reposed on his shoulders; he recommended to the medical attendants the utmost caution and silence, pointing out, at the same time, all the ill consequences which might arise, were any imprudent or sudden explanation of his real malady made to the august sufferer. Unable to attend to everything himself, and not inclined to depend upon his son, whose natural propensity he was fully aware of, he recalled to his recollection that the comte de Muy, the sincere and attached friend of the dauphin, son to Louis XV., was then in Versailles. He immediately sought him out in the apartments he occupied in the château, and communicated to him the result of the consultation respecting the king's illness.

The comte de Muy was one of those rare characters reserved by Providence for the happiness of a state, when kings are wise enough to employ them. He thought not of personal interest or advantage, but dictated to the duke the precise line of conduct he himself would have pursued under similar circumstances.

« The first thing to be done,» said he, « is to remember that the king is a Christian, and to conform in every respect to the customs of his predecessors. You are aware, my lord duke, that directly any member of the royal family is attacked by the small-pox, he ought immediately to receive extreme unction; you will, therefore, make the necessary arrangements, and apprize those whose duty it becomes to administer it.»

« This is, indeed, an unpleasant commission,» replied the duke; « to administer extreme unction to his majesty, is to announce to him cruelly and abruptly that his last hour has arrived, and to bid him prepare for death.»

« The duty is nevertheless imperative,» answered the comte de Muy, « and you incur no slight responsibility by neglecting it.»

The consequence of this conversation was, that the duke sent off two couriers immediately, one to madame Louise, and the other to the archbishop of Paris. He also apprized the ministers of the result of the consultation which had taken place, whilst the comte de Muy took upon himself the painful office of acquainting the dauphin with the dangerous state of his grandfather. This young prince, whose first impulses were always amiable, immediately burst into tears; the dauphiness endeavoured to console him. But from that moment her royal highness appeared to show by her lofty and dignified bearing, her consciousness of the fresh importance she had necessarily acquired in the eyes of the nation. Meanwhile, the dauphin hastened to the sick room of his beloved relative, anxious to bestow upon him the cares and attentions of a son; but in the anteroom his progress was stopped by the duc de la Vrillière, who informed him, that the interests of the throne would not permit his royal highness to endanger his life by inhaling the contagious atmosphere of a room loaded with the venom of the small-pox. He adjured him, in the name of the king and his country, not to risk such fearful chances. The lords in attendance, who did not partake the heroism of the young prince, added their entreaties to those of *le petit saint*, and succeeded, at length, in prevailing upon him to return to his apartments, to the great joy of Marie Antoinette, who could not endure the prospect of being separated from her husband at so important a juncture.

No sooner had the princesses learned the danger of their august parent, than without an instant's hesitation they hurried to him. I was in his chamber when they arrived; they saluted me with great gentleness and affability. When the king saw them, he inquired what had brought them thither at so unusual an hour.

« We are come to see you, my dearest father,» replied madame Adelaide; « we have heard of your indisposition, and trifling as it is said to be, we could not rest without satisfying our anxious wish to know how you found yourself.»

The other sisters expressed themselves in similar terms.

« It is all very well, my children,» said Louis XV., with a pleasing smile, « and you are all three very excellent girls, but I would rather you should keep away from this close room; it can do you no good, and I promise to let you know if I find myself getting any worse.»

After a slight resistance the princesses feigned an obedience to his will; but, in reality, they merely retired into an adjoining chamber, concealed from the sight of their parent, where they remained, until the moment when they undertook the charge of the patient. Their heroic devotion was the admiration of all France and Europe.

Much as their presence constrained me, I still kept my place beside the sick-bed of his majesty, who would not suffer me to leave him for a minute.

At an early hour the maréchale de Mirepoix returned, according to her promise. I met her in the corridor as I was passing along on my way to the king's apartment; her face was full of cheerful smiles.

« How greatly am I obliged to you for your prompt succour, » said she, without even inquiring after my health or that of the king. « Do you know, I was but just in time; ten minutes later, and I should have been refused payment for your cheque. M. de Laborde, who was so devotedly your friend only yesterday, counted out to me the glittering coin I was so anxious to obtain. He even accompanied me to my carriage, when behold, just at the moment, when, with his hat in his hand, he was most gallantly bowing, and wishing me a pleasant journey, a courier arrived from Versailles bringing him the news of the king's illness. He looked so overwhelmed with consternation and alarm, that I could not prevent myself from bursting into a hearty fit of laughter, nor has my gaiety forsaken me up to the present moment. »

« You are very fortunate, » said I, « to be enabled thus to preserve your good spirits. »

« My dear creature, I would fain cheat time of some of his claims upon me. But now I think of it, what is the matter since I was here? Is the king worse, and what is this I hear whispered abroad of the small-pox? »

« Alas, madam, » answered I, much hurt at the insensibility she displayed, « we run but too great danger of losing our friend and benefactor for ever. »

« Dear me, how very shocking! But what has he settled on you? What have you asked him for? »

« Nothing! » replied I, coolly.

« Nothing! very admirable, indeed; but, my good soul, these fine sentiments sometimes leave people to eat the bread of charity. So, then, you have not followed my advice. Once more, I repeat, lose not the present opportunity, and, in your place, I would set about securing my own interest without one instant's delay. »

« That I could not do, madam, » said I; « it is wholly foreign to my nature to take advantage of the weakness of a dying man. »

« Dying man! » repeated the maréchale incredulously, « come, come, he is not dead yet; and whilst there is life there is hope; and I suppose you have carried your ideas of disinterestedness so far as to omit mentioning your friends, likewise. You will never have any worldly sense, I believe. My dear soul," said she, stooping down and whispering in my ear, "you are surrounded by a set of selfish wretches, who care nothing for you unless you can forward their interests."

"I see it, I know it," exclaimed I impatiently; "but though I beg my bread, I will not importune the king."

"As you please," cried madame de Mirepoix, "pray do not let me disturb your intentions. Silly woman that you are, leave others to act the sublime and grand, your part should be that of a reasonable creature. Look at myself, suppose I had not seized the ball at the bound."

"You were born at Versailles," answered I, smiling in spite of myself.

"True, and I confess that with me the greatest of all sense is common sense, which produces that instinctive feeling of self-preservation implanted even in animals. But is the king indeed so very ill?"

"He is, indeed, dangerously ill."

"I am very sorry," answered she, "his majesty and myself were such old friends and companions; but things will now be very different, and we shall soon see the court filled with new faces, whilst you and I, my poor countess, may hide our diminished heads. A set of hungry wretches will drive us away from the princely banquet at which we have so long regaled, and scarcely will their eagerness leave us a few scattered crumbs — how dreadful! Yes, I repeat that for many reasons, we shall have just cause for regretting the late king."

"The *late* king!" exclaimed I. "His majesty is not yet dead, madame la maréchale."

"I know that, but he will die; and by speaking of the event as if it had already taken place, we prepare our minds to meet the blow with greater resignation when it does fall. I am much concerned, I can assure you; but let us quit the close confined air of this corridor, and go where we may breathe a purer atmosphere."

She took me by the arm with a greater familiarity than she had ever before assumed, and led the way to my chamber, where I found the duc de la Vrillière awaiting me, to request I would return to the king, who had asked for me more than once. This consummate hypocrite seized the present opportunity of renewing his assurances of an unalterable attachment to me, vowing an eternal friendship. I was weak enough to believe him, and when I gave him my hand in token of reconciliation, I espied the maréchale standing behind him, making signals to me to distrust his professions.

I know not the reason of this conduct on the part of the duc de la Vrillière, but I can only suppose it originated in his considering the king in less danger than he was said to be; however, I suffered him to lead me to the chamber of the invalid. When Louis XV. saw me return, he inquired why I had quitted him? I replied, because I was fearful of wearying him; upon which he assured me, that he only felt easy and comfortable so long as I was with him.

« But, perhaps, there is some contagion in my present complaint? » exclaimed he, as though labouring under some painful idea.

« Certainly not, » replied I; « it is but a temporary eruption of the skin, which will, no doubt, carry off the fever you have suffered with. »

« I feared it was of a more dangerous nature, » answered the king.

« You torment yourself needlessly, sire, » said I; « why should you thus create phantoms for your own annoyance and alarm? Tranquillize yourself, and leave the task of curing you to us. »

I easily penetrated the real import of his words; he evidently suspected the truth, and was filled with the most cruel dread of having his suspicions confirmed. During the whole of this day he continued in the same state of uncertainty; the strictest watch was set around him that no imprudent confession should reveal to him the real nature of his situation. I continued sitting beside him in a state of great constraint, from the knowledge of my being closely observed by the princesses, of whose vicinity we durst not inform him, in the fear of exciting his fears still more.

The courier, who had been despatched to madame Louise, returned, bringing a letter from that princess to her sisters, under cover to madame Adelaide, in which she implored of them not to suffer any consideration to prevent their immediately acquainting their father with the dangerous condition he was in. The duty, she added, was imperative, and the greatest calamity that could befall them, would be to see this dearly loved parent expire in a state of sinful indifference as to his spiritual welfare.

The august recluse, detached from all sublunary considerations, saw nothing but the glorious hereafter, where she would fain join company with all her beloved friends and connexions of this world.

The archbishop of Paris, M. de Beaumont, a prelate highly esteemed for his many excellent private qualities, but who had frequently embarrassed the king by his pertinacity, did not forget him on this occasion; for no sooner did the account of his majesty's illness reach him, than, although suffering with a most painful complaint, he hastened to Versailles, where his presence embarrassed every one, particularly the grand almoner, who, a better courtier than priest, was excessively careful never to give offence to any person, even though the king's salvation depended upon it; he, therefore, kept his apartment, giving it out that he was indisposed, and even took to his bed, the better to avoid any disagreeable or inconvenient request. The sight of the archbishop of Paris was far from being agreeable to him. This prelate went first in search of the princesses who were not to be seen on account of their being with their father. A message was despatched to them, and mesdames Adelaide and Sophie, after having a long conference with him, by his advice, summoned the bishops of Meaux, Goss, and de Senlis, and held a species of council, in which it was unanimously agreed that nothing ought to prevent their entering upon an explanation with the king, and offering him spiritual succour.

Who was to undertake the delicate commission, became the next point to consider. M. de Roquelaire declined, not wishing, as he said, to infringe upon the rights of the grand almoner, who was now at Versailles. M. de la Roche Aymon was therefore sent for, requesting his immediate attendance. Never did invitation arrive more *mal à propos*, or more cruelly disturb any manœuvring soul. However, to refuse was impossible, and the cardinal arrived, execrating the zeal of his reverend brother of Paris; who, after having explained the state of affairs to him, informed him that he was sent for for the purpose of discharging his office by preparing the king for confession.

The grand almoner replied, that the sacred duty by no means belonged to him; that his place at court was of a very different nature, and had nothing at all to do with directing the king's conscience. His majesty, he said, had a confessor, who ought to be sent for, and the very sight of him in the royal chamber would be sufficient to apprize the illustrious invalid of the motives which brought him thither. In a word, the grand almoner got rid of the affair, by saying, «that, as it was one of the utmost importance, it would be necessary to confer with his royal highness, the dauphin, respecting it.»

CHAPTER XLII.

First proceedings of the *council* — The dauphin receives the prelates with great coolness — Situation of the archbishop of Paris — Richelieu evades the project for confessing the king — The friends of madame du Barry come forward — The English physician — The abbé Terray — Interview with the prince de Soubise — The prince and the courtiers — La Martinière informs the king of the true nature of his complaint — Consequences of this disclosure.

THE different members of this *concile impromptu* declared themselves in favour of this advice, much to the grief and chagrin of the princess Adelaide. She easily perceived by this proposition that the court would very shortly change masters, and could she hope to preserve the same influence during the reign of her nephew she had managed to obtain whilst her father held the sceptre? However, she made no opposition to the resolution of the prelates, who forthwith proceeded to the dauphin, who received them with considerable coolness. As yet, but ill-assured in the new part he had to play, the prince showed himself fearful and embarrassed. The dauphiness would willingly have advised him, but that prudence would not permit her to do, so that the dauphin, left wholly to himself, knew not on what to determine.

This was precisely what the grand almoner had hoped and expected, and he laughed in his sleeve at the useless trouble taken by the archbishop; and whilst he openly affected to promote his desires as much as was in his power, he secretly took measures to prevent their success. M. de Beaumont, who was of a most open and upright nature, was far from suspecting these intrigues; indeed, his simple and pious character but ill-qualified him for the corrupt and deceitful atmosphere of a court, especially such a one as Versailles. His situation now became one of difficulty; abandoned by the bishops and the grand almoner, disappointed in his hopes of finding a supporter in the dauphin, what could he do alone with the princesses, who, in their dread of causing an emotion, which might be fatal to their parent, knew not what to resolve upon. As a last resource, they summoned the abbé Mandaux, the king's confessor. The prelate excited his zeal in all its fervour, and this simple and obscure priest determined to undertake that which many more eminent personages had shrunk from attempting.

He therefore sought admittance into the chamber of the king, where he found the ducs de Duras and de Richelieu, to whom he communicated the mission upon which he was come.

At this declaration, the consequences of which he plainly foresaw, the duc de Duras hesitated to reply, scarcely knowing how to ward off a blow the responsibility of which must fall upon him alone. The duc de Richelieu, with greater self-command, extricated him from his difficulty.

« Sir,» said he to the abbé, « your zeal is highly praiseworthy, both the duke and myself are aware of all that should be done upon such an occasion as the present; and although I freely admit that the sacred act you speak of is of an imperative nature, yet I would observe, that the king being still in ignorance of his fatal malady, neither your duties nor ours can begin, until the moment when the physicians shall have thought proper to reveal the whole truth to his majesty. This is a matter of form and etiquette to which all must submit who have any functions to fulfil in the château."

The duc de Duras could have hugged his colleague for this well-timed reply. The abbé Mandaux felt all the justness of the observation, yet with all the tenacity of his profession, he replied,

« That since it rested with the physicians to apprize the king of his being ill with the small-pox, they ought to be summoned and consulted as to the part to take.»

At these words the duc de Duras slipped away from the group, and went himself in search of Doctor Bordeu, whom he brought into an angle of the chamber out of sight of the king's bed. The duc de Duras having explained to him what the abbé had just been saying to them, as well as the desire he had manifested of preparing the king to receive the last sacraments, the doctor regarded the abbé fixedly for some instance, and then inquired in a severe tone, « Whether he had promised any person to murder the king? »

This abrupt and alarming question made the priest change colour, whilst he asked for an explanation of such a singular charge.

« I say, sir, » replied Bordeu, « that whoever speaks at present to his majesty of small-pox, confession, or extreme unction, will have to answer for his life. »

« Do you, indeed, believe, » asked the duc de Richelieu, « that the mention of these things would produce so fatal a result? »

« Most assuredly I do; and out of one hundred sick persons it would have the same effect upon sixty, perhaps eighty; indeed, I have known the shock produce instantaneous death. This I am willing to sign with my own blood if it be necessary, and my professional brother there will not dispute its truth. »

At these words he made a sign for Lemonnier to advance, and after having explained to him the subject of conversation, begged of him to speak his opinion openly and candidly. Lemonnier was somewhat of a courtier, and one glance at the two noblemen before whom he stood, was sufficient to apprize him what opinion was expected from him. He, therefore, fully and unhesitatingly confirmed all that Bordeu had previously advanced.

Strong in these decisions, the duc de Duras expressed his regret to the confessor at being unable to accord his request. « But, » added he, « You perceive the thing is impossible, unless to him who would become a regicide. »

This terrible expression renewed the former terror of the abbé, who, satisfied with having shown his zeal, was, perhaps, not very sorry for having met with such insurmountable obstacles. He immediately returned to the apartment of madame Sophie, where the council was still assembled, and related the particulars of his visit; whilst the poor archbishop of Paris, thus foiled in every attempt, was compelled to leave Versailles wholly unsuccessful.

I heard all these things from the duc de Richelieu; he told me that nothing could have been more gratifying than the conduct of Bordeu and Lemonnier, and that I had every reason for feeling satisfied with the conduct of all around me. « It is in the moment of peril, » said he, « that we are best able to know our true friends. »

« I see it, » replied I; « and since our danger is a mutual one ought we not to forget our old subjects of dispute ? »

« For my own part, madam, » returned he, « I do not remember that any ever existed; besides, is not my cause yours likewise ? A new reign will place me completely in the background. The present king looks upon me as almost youthful; while, on the contrary, his grandson will consider me as a specimen of the days of Methuselah. The change of masters can be but to my disadvantage; let us, therefore, stand firmly together, that we may be the better enabled to resist the attacks of our enemies. »

« Do you consider, » inquired I, « that we may rely upon the firmness of the duc de Duras ? »

« As safely as you may on mine, » answered he, « so long as he is not attacked face to face; but if they once assail him with the arms of etiquette, he is a lost man, he will capitulate. It is unfortunate for him that I am not likely to be near him upon such an occasion. »

Comte Jean, who never left me, then took up the conversation, and advised M. de Richelieu to leave him to himself as little as possible; it was, therefore, agreed that we should cause the duc de Duras to be constantly surrounded by persons of our party, who should keep those of our adversaries at a distance.

We had not yet lost all hope of seeing his majesty restored to health; nature, so languid and powerless in the case of poor Anne, seemed inclined to make a salutary effort on the part of the king.

Every instant of this day and the next, that I did not spend by the sick-bed of Louis XV., were engrossed by most intimate friends, the ducs d'Aiguillon, de Cossé, etc., mesdames de Mirepoix, de Forcalquier, de Valentinois, de l'Hôpital, de Montmorency, de Flaracourt, and others. As yet, none of my party had abandoned me; the situation of affairs was not, up to the present, sufficiently clear to warrant an entire defection. The good Geneviève Mathon, whom chance had conducted to Versailles during the last week, came to share with Henriette, my sisters-in-law, and my niece, the torments and uncertainties which distracted my mind. We were continually in a state of mortal alarm, dreading every instant to hear that the king was aware of his malady, and the danger which threatened, and our fears but too well proclaimed our persuasion that such a moment would be the death-blow to our hopes. It happened that in this exigency, as it most commonly occurs in affairs of great importance, all our apprehensions had been directed towards the ecclesiastics, while we entirely overlooked the probability that the abrupt la Martinière might, in one instant, become the cause of our ruin. All this so entirely escaped us, that we took not the slightest precaution to prevent it.

No sooner was the news of the king being attacked with small-pox publicly known, than a doctor Sulton, an English physician, the pretended professor of an infallible cure for this disease, presented himself at Versailles, and tendered his services. The poor man was simple enough to make his first application to those medical attendants already intrusted with the management of his majesty, but neither of them would give any attention to his professions of skill to overcome so fatal a malady. On the contrary, they treated him as a mere quack, and declared that they would never consent to confide the charge of their august patient to the hands of a stranger whatever he might be. Sulton returned to Paris, and obtaining an audience of the duc d'Orleans, related to him what had passed between himself and the king's physicians. The prince made it his business the following day to call upon the princesses, to whom he related the conversation he had held with doctor Sulton the preceding evening.

In their eagerness to avail themselves of every chance for promoting the recovery of their beloved parent, the princesses blamed the duke for having bestowed so little attention upon the Englishman, and conjured him to return to Paris, see Sulton, and bring him to Versailles on the following day. The duc d'Orleans acted in strict conformity with their wishes; and although but little satisfied with the replies made by Sulton to many of his questions relative to the measures he should pursue in his treatment of the king, he caused him to accompany him to Versailles, in order that the princesses might judge for themselves. The task of receiving him was undertaken by madame Adelaide. Sulton underwent a rigorous examination, and was offered an immense sum for the discovery of his secret, provided he would allow his remedy to be subjected to the scrutiny of some of the most celebrated chemists of the time. Sulton declared that the thing was impossible; in the first place, it was too late, the disease was too far advanced for the application of the remedy to possess that positive success it would have obtained in the earlier stage of the malady; in the next place, he could not of himself dispose of a secret which was the joint property of several members of his family.

Prayers, promises, entreaties were alike uselessly employed to change the resolution of Sulton; the fact was evidently this, he knew himself to be a mere pretender to his art, for had he been certain of what he advanced, had he even conceived the most slender hopes of saving the life of the king, he would not have hesitated for a single instant to have done all that was asked.

This chance of safety was, therefore, at an end, and spite of the opinion I entertained of Sulton, I could not but feel sorry Bordeu had not given him a better reception when he first made known his professed ability to surmount this fatal disorder. However, I was careful not to express my dissatisfaction, for it was but too important for me to avoid any dispute at a time when the support of my friends had become so essentially necessary to me.

In proportion as the king became worse, my credit also declined. Two orders, addressed to the comptroller-general and M. de la Borde, for money, met with no attention. The latter replied, with extreme politeness, that the 100,000 francs received by comte Jean a few days before the king was taken ill, and the 50,000 paid to madame de Mirepoix recently, must be a convincing proof, in my eyes, of his friendly intentions towards me, but that he had no money at present in his possession, the first he received should be at my disposal.

The abbé Terray acted with less ceremony, for he came himself to say, that, so long as the king remained ill, he would pay no money without his majesty's signature, for which my brother-in-law might either ask or wait till there no longer existed any occasion for such a precaution; and that, for his own part, he could not conceive how he could have consumed the enormous sums he had already drawn from the treasury.

This manner of speaking stung me to the quick.

« I find you, » said I to him, « precisely the mean, contemptible wretch you were described to me; but you are premature. I am not yet an exile from court, and yet you seem already to have forgotten all you owe to me. »

« I have a very good memory, madam, » replied he, « and if you wish it, I can count upon my fingers the money you and your family have received of me. You will see — »

« What shall I see? » interrupted I, « unless, indeed, it be an amount of your regrets that such a sum was not left in your hands to be pillaged by your mistresses and their spurious offspring. Really, to hear you talk, any one would suppose you a Sully for integrity, and a Colbert in financial talent. »

This vigorous reply staggered the selfish and coarse-minded abbé, who easily perceived that he had carried matters too far, and had reckoned erroneously upon the feebleness and timidity of my natural disposition; he attempted to pacify me, but his cowardly insolence had exasperated me too highly to admit of any apology or peace-making.

« Have a care what you do, » said I, « or rather employ yourself in packing up whatever may belong to you, for you shall quit your post whatever may befall. In the event of the king's death you will certainly be turned out by his successor, and if he regain his health, he must then choose between you and me, there can be no medium. Henceforward, you may consider me only in the light of your mortal enemy."

He wished to insist upon my hearing him, but I exclaimed, "Quit the room, I wish neither to see nor hear more of you."

The abbé saw that it was necessary to obey, he therefore bowed and retired. Two hours afterwards he sent me the sum which I had asked of him for my brother-in-law, accompanied by a most humble and contrite letter. Certainly, had I only listened to the inspiration of my heart, I should have sent back the money without touching it, and the epistle without reading it; but my heroism did not suit comte Jean, who chanced to be present. "Take it, take it," cried he; "the only way of punishing such a miscreant, is to break his purse-strings. He would, indeed, have the laugh on his side were your fit of anger to change into a fit of generosity; besides, this may be the last we shall ever see."

My brother-in-law and the comptroller-general were an excellent pair. I treated the latter with silent contempt, not even replying to his letter; this was, however, my first and only stroke of vengeance, the disastrous events which followed did not permit me to pursue my plans for revenging this treacherous and contemptible conduct.

This quarrel, and the defection of the *worthy* abbé, had the effect of rendering me much indisposed. My illness was attributed to an excess of sorrow for the dangerous condition of his majesty, nor did I contradict the report; for, in truth, I did most sincerely lament the malady with which the king was suffering, and my regrets arose far more from a feeling of gratitude and esteem, than any self-interested calculations. It was, therefore, in no very excellent humour that I saw the prince de Soubise enter my apartment. You may remember that this nobleman had quitted Trianon without saying one word to me, and since that period I had never seen him, although he had punctually made his inquiries after the king. When I perceived him, I could not help inquiring, with something of a sarcastic expression, whether his majesty had been pronounced convalescent? The prince comprehended the bitterness of the question.

«You are severe, madam,» replied he, «yet I can solemnly affirm that circumstances, and not inclination, have kept me from your presence until now.»

«May I believe you?» said I. «Are you quite sure you have not been imitating the policy of the abbé Terray?» Upon which I related the behaviour of the comptroller-general.

«Priest-like,» answered the prince.

«And is it not *courtier*-like also?» inquired I.

«Perhaps it may,» rejoined M. de Soubise; «for the two species of priest and courtier so nearly resemble each other in many particulars, as to have become well nigh amalgamated into one; but I claim your indulgence to make me an exception to the general rule, and to class me as a soldier and a man of honour; besides which, you are too lovely ever to be forgotten, and your past goodness to me will ensure you my services let what may occur.»

«Well, then,» said I, extending my hand, «as a reward for your candour, which I receive as genuine, I will request your forgiveness for any annoyance I may have caused you on your family's account, I ought never to have resented any thing they have done. My presence here could not fail of being highly disagreeable to them; however, they will soon be relieved from that source of uneasiness, my stay draws rapidly to a close."

The prince de Soubise, with a ready grace and obliging manner, for which I shall ever remember him with a grateful recollection, endeavoured to dispel my apprehensions as to the state of the king; but whilst I acknowledged the kindness of his intention, my heart refused all comfort in a case, which I too well knew was utterly hopeless.

The state of affairs was now so manifest, that already an obsequious crowd beseiged the doors of the dauphin, anxious to be first in the demonstration of their adoration of the rising sun; but the young prince, aided by the clear-minded advice of his august spouse, refused, with admirable prudence, to receive such premature homage; and since he was interdicted by the physicians from visiting the royal invalid, he confined himself within his apartments, admitting no person but a select few who possessed his confidence.

The disappointed satellites, frustrated in their endeavours to ingratiate themselves with the dauphin, turned their thoughts towards the comte de Provence, imagining that this prince, spite of his extreme youth, might have considerable influence over the mind of his brother, the dauphin. But this idea, however plausible, was by no means correct; it was too much the interest of ambitious and mercenary men to create a want of harmony between the royal pair, and up to the moment in which I am writing, no attempts have been made to produce a kinder and more fraternal feeling between two such near relatives.

I quitted the king as little as possible, watching with deep concern the progress of a malady, the nature of which was a secret to himself alone; for, in the dread of incurring my displeasure, no person had ventured to acquaint him with the awful fact. By the aid of the grand almoner, I had triumphed over the wishes of the archbishop of Paris, and those of the confessor. The princes and princesses awaited the event; all was calm composure; when, all at once, the barriers I had been so carefully erecting were crushed beneath my feet, at one sudden and unexpected blow.

The king was by no means easy in his own mind with regard to his illness. The many messages that were continually whispered around him, the remedies administered, and, above all, the absence of his grandsons, all convinced him that something of a very unusual and alarming nature was progressing. His own feelings might, likewise, well assure him that he was attacked by an illness of no ordinary nature. Tortured beyond further bearing by the suggestions of his fancy, Louis XV. at length resolved to ascertain the truth, and, with this intent, closely questioned Bordeu and Lemonnier, who did their best to deceive him. Still, dissatisfied with their evasive replies, he watched an opportunity, when they were both absent, to desire La Martinière would at once explain the true malady with which he was then suffering. La Martinière puzzled and confused, could only exclaim,

« I entreat of you, sire, not to fatigue yourself with conversation; remember how strongly you have been forbidden all exertion.»

« I am no child, La Martinière,» cried Louis XV., his cheeks glowing with increased fire; « and I insist upon being made acquainted with the precise nature of my present illness. You have always served me loyally and faithfully, and from you I expect to receive that candid statement every one about me seems bent upon concealing.»

« Endeavour to get some sleep, sire,» rejoined La Martinière, « and do not exhaust yourself by speaking at present.»

« La Martinière, you irritate me beyond all endurance. If you love me, speak out, I conjure you, and tell me, frankly, the name of my complaint.»

« Do you insist upon it, sire ? »

« I do, my friend, I do.»

« Then, sire, you have the small-pox; but be not alarmed, it is a disease as frequently cured as many others.»

« The small-pox! » exclaimed the king, in a voice of horror; « have I indeed that fatal disease ? and do you talk of curing it ? »

« Doubtless, sire; many die of it as well as other disorders, but we are sanguine in our hopes and expectations of saving your majesty.»

The king made no reply, but turned heavily in his bed and threw the coverlet over his face. A silence ensued, which lasted until the return of the physicians, when, finding they made no allusion to his condition, the king addressed them in a cool and offended tone.

« Why, » said he, « have you concealed from me the fact of my having the small-pox ? » This abrupt inquiry petrified them with astonishment, and unable to frame a proper reply, they stood speechless with alarm and apprehension. « Yes, » resumed the king, « but for La Martinière, I should have died in ignorance of my danger. I know now the state in which I am, and before long I shall be gathered to my forefathers. »

All around him strove to combat this idea, and exerted their utmost endeavours to persuade the royal patient that his disorder had assumed the most favourable shape, and that not a shadow of danger was perceptible, but in vain; for the blow had fallen, and the hapless king, struck with a fatal presentiment of coming ill, turned a deaf ear to all they could advance.

Bordeu, deeply concerned for what had transpired, hastened to announce to the duc de Richelieu the turn which had taken place in the face of affairs. Nothing could exceed the rage with which the news was received. The duke hurried to the king's bedside.

« Is it, indeed, true, sire, » inquired he, « that your majesty doubts of your perfect restoration to health ? May I presume to inquire whether any circumstance has occurred to diminish your confidence in your medical attendants ? »

« Duc de Richelieu, » replied the king, looking as though he would search into his very soul, « I have the small-pox. »

« Well, » returned the duke, « and, as I understand, of a most favourable sort; perhaps, it might have been better that La Martinière had said nothing about it. However, it is a malady as readily subdued by art as any other; you must not allow yourself to feel any uneasiness respecting it, science has now so much improved in the treatment of this malady. »

« I doubt not its ability to cure others, but me! Indeed, duc de Richelieu, I would much rather face my old parliament than this inveterate disease. »

« Your majesty's being able to jest is a good sign. »

At this moment, ignorant of all that had taken place, I entered the room; for, in the general confusion, no person had informed me of it. The moment Louis XV. perceived me, he exclaimed in a hollow tone,

« Dearest countess, I have the small-pox. »

At these words a cry of terror escaped me.

« Surely, sire, » exclaimed I, « this is some wandering of your imagination, and your medical attendants are very wrong to permit you to indulge it for a minute. »

« Peace! » returned Louis XV.; « you know not what you say. I have the small-pox, I repeat; and, thanks to La Martinière, I now know my real state. »

I now perceived whose hand had dealt the blow, and seeing at once all the consequences of the disclosure, exclaimed in my anger, turning towards La Martinière,

« You have achieved a noble work, indeed, sir; you could not restrain yourself within the bounds of prudence, and you see the state to which you have reduced his majesty. »

La Martinière knew not what to reply; the king undertook his defence.

« Blame him not, » said he; « but for him I should have quitted this world like a heathen, without making my peace with an offended God. »

At these words I fainted in the arms of doctor Bordeu, who, with the aid of my attendants, carried me to my chamber, and, at length, succeeded in restoring me. My family crowded around me, and sought to afford me that consolation they were in equal need of themselves.

Spite of the orders I had given to admit no person, the duc d'Aiguillon would insist upon seeing me. He exerted his best endeavours to persuade me to arm myself with courage, and, like a true and attached friend, appeared to lose sight of his own approaching fall from power in his ardent desire to serve me.

In this mournful occupation an hour passed away, and left my dejected companions sighing over the present, and, anticipating even worse prospects than those now before them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Terror of the king — A complication — Filial piety of the princesses — Last interview between madame du Barry and Louis XV. — Conversation with the maréchale de Mirepoix — The chancellor Maupeou — The fragment — Comte Jean.

PERHAPS no person ever entertained so great a dread of death as Louis XV., consequently no one required to be more carefully prepared for the alarming intelligence so abruptly communicated by La Martinière, and which, in a manner, appeared to sign the king's death-warrant.

To every person who approached him the despairing monarch could utter only the fatal phrase, « I have the small-pox,» which, in his lips, was tantamount to his declaring himself a dead man. Alas! had his malady been confined to the small-pox, he might still have been spared to our prayers; but, unhappily, a complication of evils, which had long been lurking in his veins, burst forth with a violence which, united to his cruel complaint, bade defiance to surgical or medical skill.

Yet, spite of the terror with which the august sufferer contemplated his approaching end, he did not lose sight of the interests of the nation as vested in the person of the dauphin, whom he positively prohibited, as well as his other grandsons, from entering his chamber or even visiting the part of the château he occupied. After this he seemed to divest himself of all further care for sublunary things; no papers were brought for his inspection, nor did he ever more sign any official document.

The next request made by Louis XV. was for his daughters, who presented themselves bathed in tears, and vainly striving to repress that grief which burst forth in spite of all their endeavours. The king replied to their sobs, by saying, « My children, I have the small-pox; but weep not. These gentlemen [pointing towards the physicians] assure me they can cure me.» But, while uttering this cheerful sentence, his eye caught the stern and iron countenance of La Martinière, whose look of cool disbelief seemed to deny the possibility of such an event.

With a view to divert her father from the gloom which all at once came over his features, the princess Adelaide informed him that she had a letter addressed to him by her sister, madame Louise.

«Let me hear it,» cried the king; «it is, no doubt some heavenly mission with which she is charged. But who knows?» He stopped, but it was easy to perceive that to the fear of death was added a dread of his well-being in another world. Madame Adelaide then read the letter with a low voice, while the attendants retired to a respectful distance. All eyes were directed to the countenance of the king, in order to read there the nature of its contents; but already had the ravages of his fatal disease robbed his features of every expression, save that of pain and suffering.

The princesses now took their stations beside their parent, and established themselves as nurses, an office which, I can with truth affirm, they continued to fill unto the last with all the devotion of the purest filial piety.

On this same day Louis XV. caused me to be sent for. I ran to his bedside trembling with alarm. The various persons engaged in his apartment retired when they saw me, and we were left alone.

«My beloved friend,» said the king, «I have the small-pox; I am still very ill.»

«Nay, sire,» interrupted I, «you must not fancy things worse than they are; you will do well, depend upon it, and we shall yet pass many happy days together.»

«Do you indeed think so?» returned Louis XV. «May heaven grant your prophecy be a correct one. But see the state in which I now am; give me your hand.»

He took my hand and made me feel the pustules with which his burning cheeks were covered. I know not what effect this touch of my hand might have produced, but the king in his turn patted my face, pushed back the curls which hung negligently over my brow; then, inclining me towards him, drew my head upon his pillow. I submitted to this whim with all the courage I could assume; I even went so far as to be upon the point of bestowing a gentle kiss upon his forehead. But, stopping me, with a mournful air, he said, « No, my lovely countess; I am no longer myself, but here is a miniature which has not undergone the same change as its unfortunate master.»

I took the miniature, which I placed with respectful tenderness in my bosom, nor have I ever parted with it since.

This scene lasted for some minutes, after which I was retiring, but the king called me back, seized my hand, which he tenderly kissed, and then whispered an affectionate « Adieu.» These were the last words I ever heard from his lips.

Upon re-entering my apartments I found madame de Mirepoix awaiting me, to whom I related all that had taken place, expressing, at the same time, my earnest hope of being again summoned, ere long, to the presence of my friend and benefactor.

« Do not deceive yourself, my dear,» said she; « depend upon it you have had your last interview; you should have employed it more profitably. His portrait! why, if I mistake not, you have *five* already. Why did you not carry about with you some deed of settlement ready for signature? he would have denied you nothing at such a moment, when you may rest assured he knew himself to be taking his last farewell.»

« Is it possible?» exclaimed I. «And can you really suppose the king believed he spoke to me for the last time?»

« I have not the slightest doubt of it; I have known him for many a day. He remembers the scene of Metz, and looks upon you as forming the second edition of the poor duchesse de Chateauroux, who, by the by, was not equal to you in any respect.»

I burst into a fit of tears, but not of regret for having allowed my late interview with the king to pass in so unprofitable a manner. However, the maréchale, misconceiving the cause of this burst of grief, exclaimed, « Come, come; it is too late now, and all your sorrow cannot recall the last half-hour. But, mademoiselle du Barry,» continued she, « I advise you to commence your packing up at once, that when the grand move comes, you may not in your hurry, leave anything behind you.»

These remarks increased my affliction, but the maréchale had no intention of wounding my feelings, and worldly-minded as she was, considered all that could be saved out of the wreck as the only subject worthy attention. Meanwhile, comte Jean, with a gloomy and desponding air, continued silently with folded arms to pace the room, till all at once, as if suddenly struck by the arguments of madame de Mirepoix, he exclaimed,

« The maréchale is right »; and abruptly quitted the apartment, as if to commence his own preparations.

Ere madame de Mirepoix had left me and she remained till a late hour, the ducs d'Aiguillon and de Cossé arrived, who, although less experienced in their knowledge of the king's character, were yet fully of her opinion respecting my last visit to him.

Scarcely had these visitors withdrawn, than I was apprized that the chancellor of France desired to see me. He was admitted, and the first glance of the countenance of M. de Maupeou convinced me that our day of power was rapidly closing.

« Your servant, cousin,» said he, seating himself without the smallest ceremony; « at what page of our history have we arrived ? »

« By the unusual freedom and effrontery of your manner,» answered I, « I should surmise that we have reached the word *finis.*»

« Oh,» replied the chancellor, « I crave your pardon for having omitted my best bow; but, my good cousin, my present visit is a friendly one, to advise you to burn your papers with as little delay as possible.»

"Thank you for your considerate counsel," said I, coolly, "but I have no papers to destroy. I have neither mixed with any state intrigue, nor received a pension from the English government. Nothing will be found in my drawers but some unanswered billets-doux."

"Then as I can do nothing for you, my good cousin, oblige me by giving this paper to the duc d'Aiguillon."

"What is it?" inquired I, with much curiosity.

"Have you forgotten our mutual engagement to support each other, and not to quit the ministry until the other retired also? I have lately been compelled (from perceiving how deeply the duke was manœuvring against me) to send him a copy of this agreement. Under other circumstances I might have availed myself of this writing, but now it matters not; the blow which dismisses me proceeds from other hands than his, and I am willing to leave him the consolation of remaining in power a few days after myself. Give him, then, this useless document; and now, farewell, my pretty cousin, let us take a last embrace."

Upon which the chancellor, presuming until the last upon our imaginary relationship, kissed my cheek, and having put into my hands the paper in question, retired with a profound bow.

This ironical leave taking left me stupefied with astonishment, and well I presaged my coming disgrace from the absurd mummery the chancellor had thought fit to play off.

Comte Jean, who had seen M. de Maupeou quit the house, entered my apartment to inquire the reason of his visit. Silent and dejected, I allowed my brother-in-law to take up the paper, which he read without any ceremony. "What is the meaning of this scrawl?" cried comte Jean, with one of his usual oaths; "upon my word our cousin is a fine fellow," continued he, crushing the paper between his fingers. "I'll engage that he still hopes to keep his place; however, one thing consoles me, and that is, that both he and his parliament will soon be sent to the right about."

Our conversation was interrupted by the entrance of

Chamilly, who came to acquaint me that the king was sleeping, and did not wish to be again disturbed that night. Remembering my usual omnipotence in the château, I was about, like a true idiot, to prove to Chamilly that the king's interdict did not extend to me, when I was stopped in my purpose by the appearance of the duc d'Aiguillon; and as it was now nearly eleven o'clock at night, I could scarcely doubt his being the bearer of some extraordinary message.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The duc d'Aiguillon brings an order for the immediate departure of madame du Barry — The king's remarks recapitulated — The countess holds a privy council — Letter to madame de Mirepoix and the ducs de Cossé and d'Aiguillon — Night of departure — Ruel — Visit from madame de Forcalquier.

I said I did not expect the duc d'Aiguillon; and the grief which was spread over his features, and the large tears which stood in his eyes, persuaded me but too plainly that all hope was at an end.

« Is the king dead? » cried I, in a stifled voice.

« No, madam, » replied he, « Louis XV. still lives, nor is it by any means certain that the misfortune you apprehend is in store for us. »

« He sends me from him, then, » exclaimed I, with a convulsive cry, « and my enemies have triumphed. »

« His majesty is but of human nature, madam, » replied the duke; « he feels himself dangerously ill, dreads the future, and believes that he owes his people a sort of reparation for past errors. »

« How, my lord duke, » interrupted I, « this grave language in your lips — but no matter. Inform me only at whose desire you state these melancholy facts; speak, I am prepared for your mission, be it what it may. »

« You shall hear everything, madam, » replied the duke, leading me to an arm-chair. I seated myself; my sisters-in-law, my niece, and comte Jean stood around me, eagerly waiting the duke's communication. « A few hours after you had been removed from his chamber, the king inquired of the princess Adelaide whether it were generally known at Paris that he had the small-pox. The princess replied in the affirmative, adding:

"'The archbishop of Paris was here twice during yesterday to inquire after you.'

"'Yet I belong more properly to the diocese of Chartres,' returned the king, 'and surely M. de Fleury would not interest himself less about me than M. de Beaumont.'

"'They are both truly anxious about you, my dearest father, and if you would only see them—'

"'No, no,' answered Louis XV.; 'they must not be taken from the duties of their respective dioceses; besides, in case of need, I have my grand almoner.'

"Madame Adelaide did not venture to urge the matter further just then, and, after a short interval of silence, a message was brought from you, inquiring whether you could see the king, to which he himself replied, that he felt inclined to sleep, and would rather not see any person that night. I was in the chamber, and he very shortly called me to him, and said:

"'Duc d'Aiguillon, I have the small-pox; and you are aware that there is a sort of etiquette in my family which enjoins my immediately discharging my duties as a Christian.'

"'Yes, sire, if the malady wore a serious aspect; but in your case —'

"'May God grant,' replied he, 'that my disorder be not dangerous; however, it may become so, if it is as yet harmless, and I would fain die as a believer rather than an infidel. I have been a great sinner, doubtless; but I have ever observed Lent with a most scrupulous exactitude. I have caused more than a hundred thousand masses to be said for the repose of unhappy souls; I have respected the clergy, and punished the authors of all impious works, so that I flatter myself I have not been a very bad Christian.'

"I listened to his discourse with a heavy heart, yet I still strove to reassure the king respecting his health, of which, I assured him, there was not the slightest doubt.

"'There is one sacrifice,' said the king, in a low and hurried tone, 'that my daughter Louise, her sisters, and the clergy, will not be long in exacting from me in the name of etiquette. I recollect the scene of Metz, and it would be highly disagreeable to me to have it repeated at Versailles; let us, therefore, take our precautions in time to prevent it. Tell the duchesse d'Aiguillon that she will oblige me by taking the comtesse du Barry to pass two or three days with her at Ruel.'

"'How, sire!' exclaimed I, 'send your dearest friend from you at a time when you most require her cares?'

"'I do not send her away,' answered the king, with mournful tenderness, 'I but yield to present necessity; let her submit as she values my happiness, and say to her, that I hope and believe her absence will be very short.'"

The duke here ceased his recital, which fully confirmed all my previous anticipations. My female relatives sobbed aloud, while comte Jean, compressing his lips, endeavoured to assume that firmness he did not really possess. By a violent effort I forced myself to assume a sort of resignation.

"Am I required to depart immediately?" inquired I.

"No," said the duke; "to leave the château in the middle of the night would be to assume the air of a flight, we had better await the coming day; it will, besides, afford time to apprize the duchess."

While the duc d'Aiguillon was thus gone to arrange for my departure, I requested to be left alone. My heart was oppressed, and I felt the need of venting my grief upon some friendly bosom. After a few moments, spent in collecting my thoughts, I addressed two letters, one to the maréchale de Mirepoix, and the other to the duc de Cossé; to the former I wrote on account of my retirement to Ruel, bewailed the sad turn my prospects had assumed, expressed my deep concern for the severe illness of my excellent friend and benefactor, begging of her to defend my character from all unjust attacks, and to allow me to be blamed for no faults but such as I had really been guilty of. I concluded with these words, "I set out at seven o'clock to-morrow morning; the duchesse d'Aiguillon will conduct me to Ruel, where I shall remain until I am ordered elsewhere."

To the duke I merely sent a short account of my present prospects, hour of departure, etc. And, my feelings somewhat relieved by the penning of these epistles, I threw myself upon a couch to await the morning. Upon awaking, I received the following note from the duchesse d'Aiguillon:—

«Madame la comtesse,—I owe his majesty many thanks for the pleasing, yet mournful, task he has allotted me. Your kindness to my family, independently of my private regard for you, gives you the surest claim of my best services during this afflicting period. Let me beseech of you not to despair, but cheerfully anticipate brighter days.

«I will call for you at seven o'clock, and if you approve of it, we will use my carriage. Ruel is entirely at your disposal and that of your family.»

This note was truly characteristic of its amiable writer, who at court passed for a cold-hearted, frigid being, whilst, in reality, the warm feelings of her excellent heart were reserved for her chosen friends.

I have never admired those general lovers who profess to love every one, nor do I feel quite sure it is a very strong recommendation to say a person is beloved by all who know her. Read, now, a striking contrast to the short but sympathizing billet of madame d'Aiguillon, in the following heartless letter from the maréchale de Mirepoix, which was put into my hands as I was ascending the carriage.

«My lovely countess,—I am all astonishment! Can it be possible that you are to quit Versailles? You are right in saying you have been the friend of every one, and those who could speak ill of you are to be pitied for not having had better opportunities of understanding your real character. But fear not, the dauphiness is virtue personified, and the dauphin equally perfect. Every thing promises a peaceful and indulgent reign, should we have the misfortune to lose his present majesty. Still there will always be a great void left at Versailles; as far as I am concerned, I have passed so much of my time with you, that I cannot imagine what I shall do with my evenings; it will cost me much of my age to alter habits and customs now so long fixed and settled, but such is life; nothing certain, nothing stable. We should imitate cats in our attachments, and rather identify ourselves with the house than the possessor of it. I trust you have secured an ample provision for the future; neglect not the present, to-morrow may come in vain for you.

«Be sure you let me know the spot to which you permanently retire, and I will endeavour to see you as frequently as my engagements will admit of. Adieu, *ma belle petite.*»

Spite of the bitterness of my feelings, this letter drew a smile to my lips; the allusion to cats which had escaped the maréchale exactly applied to her own character, of which I had been warned before I became acquainted with her; but her protestations of warm and unutterable attachment had gained my confidence, and I allowed myself to be guided implicitly by her.

The duchesse d'Aiguillon was waiting for me while I perused the above letter; at length, with a sigh, I prepared to quit that palace of delights where I had reigned absolute mistress. I cast a mournful look around me, on those splendid walks, fountains and statues, worthy the gardens of Armida, but where there reigned, at this early hour, a sort of gloomy silence; whilst, in that chamber where love had well nigh deified me and recognised me as queen of France, lay extended the monarch so lately my protector and friend.

It was the Wednesday of the fifth of May that I took my seat in the carriage of the duchesse d'Aiguillon accompanied by my sister-in-law and the vicomtesse Adolphe, who would not forsake me. Bischi remained with madame d'Hargicourt, whose duties detained her with the comtesse d'Artois. Her husband also remained at Versailles, while comte Jean and his son proceeded to Paris. I will not attempt to describe the emotions with which I quitted my magnificent suite of apartments, and traversed the halls and staircases already crowded by persons anxiously awaiting the first intimation of the king's decease. I was wrapped in my pelisse, and effectually eluded observation. It has been said that I left Versailles at four o'clock in the morning, but that was a mere invention on the part of my servants to baffle the curiosity of those who might have annoyed me by their presence.

We pursued our way in mournful reflection, whilst madame d'Aiguillon, with her wonted goodness, sought by every means to distract me from the dejection in which I was buried. Her husband, who remained with the king, engaged to write me a true account of all that transpired during my absence, and I shall very shortly present you with a specimen of the fidelity with which he performed his promise. The duchess did the honours of Ruel.

« Here,» said she, « the great cardinal Richelieu loved to repose himself from the bustle and turmoil of a court.»

« I think,» answered I, « it would have been less a favourite with his eminence had it been selected for his abode on the eve of his disgrace.»

Immediately upon my arrival I retired to bed, for fatigue had so completely overpowered me that I fell into a heavy slumber, from which I did not awake till the following day; when I found the duchesse d'Aiguillon, my sister-in-law, Geneviève Mathon, and Henriette, seated by my bed: the sight of them was cheering and gratifying proof of my not being as yet abandoned by all the world.

I arose, and we were just about to take our places at table, when madame de Forcalquier arrived. I must confess that her presence was an agreeable surprise to me; I was far from reckoning on her constancy in friendship, and her present conduct proved her worthy of her excellent friend, madame Boncault, whose steady attachment I had so frequently heard extolled. The sight of her imparted fresh courage to me, and I even resumed my usual high spirits, and in the sudden turn my ideas had taken, was childish enough to express my regrets for the loss of my downy and luxurious bed at Versailles, complaining of the woful difference between it and the one I had slept on at Ruel.

The duchesse d'Aiguillon, who must have pitied the puerility of such a remark, gently endeavoured to reconcile me to it by reminding me that both the marquise de Pompadour and the cardinal de Richelieu had reposed upon that very couch.

I endeavoured to return some sportive reply, but my thoughts had flown back to Versailles, and my momentary exhilaration was at an end. Tears rose to my eyes and choked my attempts at conversation; I therefore begged the duchess would excuse me, and retired to my apartment until I could compose myself; but the kind and attentive friend to whose hospitality I was then confided needed no further mention of my hard couch, but caused the best bed Ruel contained to be prepared for me by the time I again pressed my pillow.

This same evening brought M. de Cossé, who could no longer repress his impatience to assure me of his entire devotion. He appeared, on this occasion, if possible, more tender and more respectful in his manner of evincing it than ever.

We supped together without form or ceremony, the party consisting of mesdames d'Aiguillon, de Forcalquier, and myself, mademoiselle du Barry, and the vicomtesse Adolphe, the prince de Soubise and the duc de Cossé. But the meal passed off in sorrowful silence; each of us seemed to abstain from conversation as though the slightest remark might come fraught with some painful allusion. On the following day I received the letter from the duc d'Aiguillon which you will find in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLV.

The duc d'Aiguillon's first letter — The maréchale de Mirepoix — A second letter from the duc d'Aiguillon — Numerous visitors.

"My much esteemed friend, — I promised you upon your departure to inform you of all that transpired, and although the task is a mournful one, I will do my best to acquit myself with zeal and sincerity, and each evening I will write you an exact detail of all that has occurred during the day. The king remains much as you left him, and you must know that already his medical attendants differ in their opinion respecting him — Lemonnier utterly despairing of his recovery, while Bordeu is most sanguine that he shall be enabled to restore him to health. La Martinière persists in his assertion that the attention of the king should be immediately directed to his spiritual concerns. The archbishop of Paris remains until called for in the ante-chamber, and the princesses never leave the bedside of their august parent.

"The king spoke with me concerning you for some time this morning, and I can assure you, you are the first object in his thoughts; he has begged of me never to forsake you, and has deigned to repose in me the enviable post of your future protector. 'I bequeath my beloved friend to your fidelity,' added the suffering prince. I took advantage of this opportunity to remark that I looked upon your quitting Versailles as too precipitate and premature a step. 'No, no,' replied the king, 'I have acted for the best; I have once been deceived as to my condition, and I would willingly prevent being again taken by surprise. Tell my beloved and excellent countess how truly I love her'; and hearing the prince de Soubise mention his design of supping at Ruel, he charged him to embrace you for him.

"The dauphin still remains secluded in his apartment, but I know that he keeps up a regular correspondence with madame Victoire, whose letters, after being immersed in vinegar, are carried to the comte de Muy, who fumigates them previously to allowing them to reach the hands of the dauphin.

"I am, etc., etc.

"Versailles, *May 5, 1774, nine o'clock, evening.*"

Upon awaking the following morning I again received news of the king, who was stated to have passed a good night, and even La Martinière seemed inclined to hope. As yet, then, there were no safe grounds for abandoning me, and about two o'clock in the afternoon I was favoured with a visit from madame de Mirepoix, who, running up to me, exclaimed with her usual vivacity,

« Oh, my dear creature, how I longed to see you! » and then leading me into another chamber, she added,

« Do you know I quite missed you? As I wrote you, my time hung heavily on my hands. What in the world will become of me if I am compelled to resign the delightful hours granted to the envied few who are permitted the *entrée* to the *petits appartements?* For you see, my dear, the dauphiness will be far from bestowing that honour upon me. I am too old to form one of her coterie, and I shall be laid aside like the rest of the antiquities of the château. By the way, » continued the voluble maréchale, « there is already a great cabal in the château respecting the formation of a new ministry, in which, besides desiring lucrative posts for themselves, all are anxious to introduce their private friends; in the midst of so many absorbing interests you appear to be already forgotten, which, by the way, is no bad thing for you. Your best plan is to remain perfectly tranquil. » Then rapidly passing to her most prevailing idea, this excellent friend proceeded to inquire what the king had bestowed on me as a parting present, « for, » said she, « he would not certainly permit you to leave Versailles empty-handed. »

« It is a point, » replied I, « that neither his majesty nor myself once thought of. »

« Then such an omission proves him a vile egotist, and you a prodigious simpleton, » answered she; « and were I in your place, I would commission the duc d'Aiguillon to make a direct demand of a future provision for you; you really should see about this, and secure to yourself a noble establishment for yourself and your friends, who ought not to suffer for your overstrained delicacy. Look at the duc de Choiseul, who has kept a regular court at Chanteloup, and never wanted for a train of courtiers at it. »

After this lesson of worldly wisdom, the excellent maréchale gave me a friendly kiss, returned to her carriage, and I saw her no more during my stay at Ruel.

The evening brought with it a second letter from the duc d'Aiguillon, it was as follows:—

> «MADAM,—I hasten to acquaint you with the pleasing information of his majesty being considerably better; his strength appears to have returned, and he himself, in the consciousness of improving health, expressed aloud his regret for having been so hasty in advising your removal from him. He has continually repeated, 'How weak and selfish of me thus to afflict my dearest countess! would you not advise me, my friend, to request her immediate return?' Of course, my reply was in the affirmative. His majesty then put the same question to the duc de Richelieu, who answered, that in his opinion it was the best plan he could decide upon. The bulletin signed by the different physicians accompanies this: it leaves me nothing to add but to recommend your bearing with patience this temporary absence from court, to which you will ere long return, more idolized, more sought after, than ever. The duc de la Vrillière and the abbé Terray present the assurance of their unbounded respect and devotion, etc., etc.»

The duchess, my sister-in-law, and niece shared in joy at such gratifying intelligence, and the ensuing day brought a concourse of visitors to Ruel; indeed, any one might have supposed that fresh swarms of flatterers and courtiers had been created only to swell my number of humble and obsequious adorers. I bestowed on each unmeaning guest a smiling welcome, for indeed, my heart was too light and I felt too happy to be enabled to frown even upon those who, when the storm appeared near, had basely deserted me.

It was amusing enough to see with what zeal any person, whom I had previously recommended was assisted by the various ministers in the pursuit of their object; the *petit saint* found himself all at once at leisure to pay his respects to me. He confirmed all the kind messages sent me by the king through the duc d'Aiguillon. Madame de Mirepoix, who had visited me the preceding evening, reserved her next call for the following day, but a few hours effected a cruel change in my fortune.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A third letter from the duke — The king receives extreme unction — Letter from madame Victoire to the dauphin — M. de Machault — A promenade with the duc de Cossé — Kind attention from the prince des Deux Ponts — A fourth letter from the duc d'Aiguillon — Comte Jean bids me farewell — M. d'Aiguillon's fifth letter, containing an account of the death of Louis XV. — The duc de la Vrillière — The *lettre de cachet* — Letter to the queen — Departure for the abbey of *Pont aux Dames.*

THE account received in the evening from the duc d'Aiguillon I shall not transcribe, as it was merely a repetition of the good tidings of the morning. The day following still brought a continuation of favorable accounts, but the next letter was in these words: —

"MADAM, AND MOST HONORED FRIEND, — Arm yourself with courage; the king is extremely ill, and I ought not to conceal from you that serious apprehensions are entertained for his life; he has passed a wretched night. His daughters, who never quitted his bedside, whispered to him that the archbishop of Paris and his grand almoner were in the anteroom if he desired to see them. The king did not seem to hear their words, but about three o'clock in the morning he called the duc de Duras, whom he bade inquire whether M. Mandoux were in the château; and, if so, to apprize him he wished to speak with him.

"At these words the princesses and all who heard them burst into a fit of weeping, which was only interrupted by the arrival of the confessor, who, approaching the bedside of the penitent, held a conference with him of nearly a quarter of an hour: this being concluded, the king, in a low and firm voice, inquired for his almoner. The latter soon presented himself, anxious to discharge the duties of his sacred office. His majesty kept continually repeating to his afflicted children, 'My daughters, why should what I am now about to do agitate or alarm you? You are well aware, that having the small-pox, the etiquette established in my family compels me to receive the last solemn rites of the church, and I but acquit myself of an obligation in submitting to it.'

"The tone in which the king spoke convinced his attendants that he rather strove to re-assure himself than his children, by the persuasion that the receiving extreme unction was not so much the consequence of his own dangerous state as a mere act of obedience to an established custom. It was then decided that the sacred ceremony should take place at seven o'clock in the morning; and here arose some little embarrassment; the ecclesiastics insisting upon the necessity of the king's making some striking and open atonement for what they were pleased to term the scandal of his private life.

«The king's chamber now presented a picture at once solemn and gloomy. Grouped together on one side the bed might be seen the different noblemen in attendance upon his majesty; a little removed stood the clergy, concealed from the invalid by the closely-drawn curtains; in the midst of these contending parties were the princesses going from one to the other, vainly seeking by mild and gentle mediation to produce a satisfactory arrangement. It was at length understood, that, on account of the extreme weakness of the invalid, the grand almoner should pronounce in his name a kind of honorable apology for past offences.

«You can scarcely imagine, madam, the universal consternation spread throughout the château by the information that the king was about to receive the last rites of his church. The terror and alarm became overpowering for a while, but subsiding into a more religious feeling crowds of persons followed with solemn reverence the holy procession as it passed along, bearing the holy sacrament to their expiring monarch. At the moment when it was administered the grand almoner, turning towards all present, pronounced the following words in the king's name: —

«‹Gentlemen, the weakness of his majesty preventing him from expressing himself, he has commanded me to inform you, that although he is responsible to God alone for his conduct, he yet regrets having caused any scandal to his people by the irregularities of his life, that he sincerely repents of his sins; and, should Providence restore him to health, he purposes living henceforward in all the virtue and morality of his youth, in the defence and maintenance of religion, in preserving a true faith, and in watching over the best interests of his people.›

«Yours, madam, etc., etc.»

I learned also, through another channel, that (according to custom) forty hours' prayer had been enjoined in every church in France to implore the mercy of heaven for the king. I heard too that the shrine of Saint Geneviève had been displayed for the veneration of true believers.

I passed a miserable night, dreaming of graves, winding-sheets, and funeral-torches, from which I only awoke to receive the morning's despatches. Alas! the news but confirmed the distressing state of the king. The very solitude in which I was left at Ruel might alone have served to convince me of my misfortune; for, with the exception of the duc de Cossé, no person came near us. M. de Cossé invited me to walk with him in the garden; I accepted the arm of this noble friend, and we directed our steps towards the wood. When we were there secure from interruption, the duke inquired what were my plans for the future?

"How can I tell you," answered I; "what is henceforward to be my fate is better known to our future queen than to myself."

"That is precisely what I dread," replied M. de Cossé. "Unfortunately you have deeply offended the queen elect, who has irritated her husband's mind against you; and then the Choiseul faction will, in all probability, come into power."

"I see all this," returned I, "and am prepared for whatever may happen."

"I admire your calmness in a moment like the present," cried the duke; "but have a care. Perhaps the best thing would be to remove you beyond the reach of the first shock of court displeasure. In your place I would request passports from the duc d'Aiguillon and travel into England."

"Oh, speak not of such a thing, I conjure you," interrupted I; "I have a horror of such journeys, and would much rather trust to the generosity of the dauphiness. She is about to become a great queen, while I shall be a creature so humiliated and abased, that the very difference between our situations will be a sufficient vengeance in her eyes."

We returned to the house, and had scarcely entered, when M. de Palchelbel, plenipotentiary to the prince des Deux Ponts, was announced.

"M. de Palchelbel," cried I, extending my hand, "what good wind brings you here?"

"I have been honoured by the commands of the prince, my master, madam," replied he, "to bring you the assurances of his unalterable friendship; and to say further, that whenever you feel dissatisfied with your residence in France, you will find at Deux Ponts an asylum, which the most earnest endeavors of the prince, my gracious patron, will strive to render agreeable to you."

I was much affected by this mark of generous regard on the part of prince Charles Auguste; and, turning quickly towards the duke, I exclaimed,

"What think you of all this? Will you henceforward believe those self-dubbed philosophers, who assert that friendship is unknown to royalty? You have here a proof of the contrary. For my own part, M. de Palchelbel," continued I, turning towards the minister, "I am much gratified by your message, and entreat of you to thank his royal highness most sincerely for me. I will write to him myself on the subject, but beg of you to repeat that, kind as are his offers, I cannot accept of them; but shall certainly remain in France until the new sovereign commands or permits me to quit it."

I afterwards repeated to the minister of Deux Ponts what I had previously stated in the garden to M. de Cossé, and had the satisfaction of hearing madame d'Aiguillon approve of my sentiments.

When I retired to my apartment I was followed by my niece.

"How happy are you, dear aunt," said she, "to preserve such friends in your present troubles."

"I owe them," replied I, "to my simplicity and candor."

"Will you not retire to Germany?"

"Certainly not," answered I.

"Yet it would be better to allow the first burst of displeasure on the part of the dauphiness to pass over."

"Who gave you this counsel, my dear niece? I am quite sure it does not originate in yourself."

"I had promised not to tell," answered she; "but if you insist upon it, I must confess, that I was persuaded by the prince de Condé and M. de Soubise to urge you to follow it."

"Do they then wish for my absence?" inquired I, angrily.

"Only for your own sake, dearest aunt."

"I thank them; but my resolution is formed to commit myself entirely to Providence in this melancholy affair."

The day passed on; and with feverish impatience I waited the arrival of the next courier: he came, at length, and confirmed my worst fears; the king was entirely given over by his physicians, and his dissolution was hourly expected. The letter containing this mournful tidings concluded thus:—

> "I have just seen comte Jean, he is here incognito. We had entirely forgotten that passports would be necessary; however, I have now furnished him with four for England, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. The count is far from partaking of your sense of security, and is wisely anxious (as I think) of shielding himself from the first burst of royal vengeance. The duchess has informed me of your refusal of an asylum at Deux Ponts; and, while I admire your courage, permit me to add, that you should rather have listened to the dictates of prudence than magnanimity under present circumstances."

The following morning, at an early hour, comte Jean entered my chamber, saying,

"I understand the king is dead; have you heard anything of it?"

"Were the report correct," answered I, "I should have known it ere the intelligence reached Paris."

"Well, living or dead, I am advised to keep out of the way; and this night will see me on my journey from Paris. Will you accompany me?"

"No," replied I; "I have refused travelling with a much more creditable companion than yourself."

"There you are wrong then; for, depend upon it, a cloister will be your fate: at any rate my business here is at an end. The new monarch is young, and attached to his wife, and my daughter-in-law is too great a simpleton to be turned to any account at court."

My brother-in-law then requested I would furnish him with money. I gave him what I had, and placed in his hands diamonds to the value of 30,000 francs. He was very anxious to obtain all my jewels, under pretence of conveying them safely out of the kingdom, but this I was too wise to agree to; he would have staked them at the first gaming-table he met with. We separated without much emotion on either side. He next took leave of Chon and his daughter-in-law; the former wept bitterly, for she was a most excellent and amiable girl; but the latter, who knew but too much of the villainy of her father-in-law, could scarcely repress her joy at his departure. Comte Jean perceived it; and, according to his brutal custom, indulged in a coarse jest at her expense; for one of his maxims was to hold all women in sovereign contempt but such as could be useful to him. For my own part, his absence gave me something like a feeling of pleasure; his presence was wearisome to me; it was like the dregs of the cup which had intoxicated my senses.

During the day several false reports arrived of the death of the king; but at length, about half past four o'clock in the afternoon, I received the following letter: —

«Madam, — You have lost your best friend and I an excellent master: at three o'clock this day his majesty breathed his last. I can scarcely describe to you the horrors of his death-bed. The princesses Adelaide and Sophie braved the frightful contagion to the last, and never quitted him till the last spark had flown. Alas! with the exception of themselves, every attendant openly expressed their weariness and disgust.

«For several days the physicians have forbidden the windows to be opened; and those condemned to inhale the pestilential vapor of the room vainly sought to counteract them by every powerful fumigation. Alas, madam, what is a king when he can no longer grasp the sceptre? How great a leveller is death! The prelates had abandoned the sick chamber, and left a simple curé of the chapel to take their place; the lords in waiting and other officers shrunk from the duties of their office, and, with their eyes fixed on a time-piece eagerly awaited the hour which should free them from it. The princesses, who perceived this impatience, durst make no complaint, while the king, occasionally recovering his senses, uttered broken sentences, expressive of the religious terror which had seized his mind. At length, at a few minutes past three o'clock, Lemonnier, in his capacity of first physician, said, after laying his hand upon the heart of the patient, and placing a glass before his lips, ‹The king is dead.› At these words all present strove with indecent haste to quit the chamber; not a single sigh, not one regret was heard. The princesses were carried insensible to their apartments.

«The extinction of a *bougie* which had been placed in a certain window, announced the accession of the dauphin ere the duc d'Aumont had informed him of the decease of his august grandsire.»

This letter wrung from me some bitter tears, as well for the king, who had so lavishly bestowed his affections upon me, as for myself. What would now be my fate? Alas! I knew not; all my brilliant prospects were buried in the coffin of my late protector.

The duc d'Aiguillon arrived at Ruel about midnight; he, as well as the other ministers who had been about the late monarch during his last illness, being prohibited by etiquette from following the present monarch to Choisy, whither the whole of the royal family had retired for a few days. He told us that the duc d'Aumont, having commanded La Martinière to proceed with the embalming of the royal corpse, that physician replied, « Certainly, my lord, it shall be done if you command it, but, in that case, the duties of your office compel you to receive his majesty's bowels in a golden dish; and I protest, that such is the state of the body, that of all who may assist at the operation, not one will survive eight days. It is for your grace to determine what shall be done.»

M. d'Aumont thought no more of embalming his late master, but gave orders for the body being immediately placed in a leaden coffin, from which there still issued frightful effluvia.

Up to the moment of my quitting Ruel madame de Mirepoix gave me no token of recollection: I heard that herself and the prince de Beauvau were reconciled, and for her sake I rejoiced at it. No person came near us the whole of the day with the exception of M. de Cossé, and I sat in hourly expectation of some order from court. At length we descried a travelling carriage with six horses, proceeding at a rapid pace up the avenue. « I know that livery,» exclaimed I; « 'tis that of my humble adorer, my obsequious slave, my friend at court, the duc de la Vrillière, commonly called *le petit saint*. You see that the good soul could not delegate to another the pleasing task of arresting me; but permit me to retire to my apartment; it is fitting he should seek me there if he has any communication to make to me.» The duchess approved my resolution; and the duc de la

Vrillière having been introduced into the salon, after the first compliments, requested to see me, that he might acquaint me with the king's pleasure.

Mademoiselle du Barry undertook to inform me of the duke's arrival.

«You were not mistaken, dear sister,» said she; «the duc de la Vrillière is the bearer of the king's orders respecting you: but compose yourself, I beseech you.»

«Fear not,» said I; «I am as calm as you would have me. Tell the vile dissembler, I mean the duke, I await him.»

M. Tartuffe was but a faint copy of *le petit saint* as he presented himself before me. His manners still retained part of their former servility, but there was a lurking smile about him, which proved how well he was pleased with the part he had to perform.

He approached me with lingering steps and an air of mysterious importance, while a sort of sardonic grin contradicted the sorrow he endeavored to force into his countenance. For my own part, I caused the folding-doors to be thrown open, and advancing ceremoniously, stood to receive the orders of the king. I bowed stiffly and silently; and, with something like a malicious satisfaction, I witnessed the embarrassment into which my cool and collected manner threw him.

«Madam,» said he at last, «I have a painful duty to perform: in a word, I am the bearer of a *lettre de cachet.*»

«Well, sir!» said I, tranquilly.

«Madam, I must request you to believe how greatly I regret the task imposed upon me; but my duty and obedience to the king—»

«Would enable you to strangle your nearest relative. All that is well known; but, in the name of all that is base, cowardly, and unmanly, could no one but *you* be found to remind a distressed and afflicted woman that she has lost her only friend and support?»

«Madam, I repeat, obedience—necessity—»

«Enough, sir; I pity you.»

«Madam, you outrage the king in my person.»

«No, sir; I respect the king too highly to believe that there could ever be any relation between him and one who is too contemptible to remind me that he was but a few days back the most cringing of my servile slaves."

Le petit saint, boiling with rage, with an unsteady hand, unfolded and read, in a trembling voice, the following words:

> "MADAME LA COMTESSE DU BARRY,— For reasons, which have for their object the preservation of the tranquillity of my kingdom, and the prevention of any state secrets confided to you being promulgated, I send this order for your immediate removal to *Pont aux Dames*, accompanied by one female attendant only, and under the escort of the exempt who has the necessary orders. This measure is by no means intended to be either disagreeable or of long duration. I therefore pray God to have you in his holy keeping.
>
> "(Signed) LOUIS."

"That, madam," continued the duke, "is his majesty's pleasure, and you have nothing to do but to submit."

"Your advice was not asked, my lord," returned I; "I honor and obey the king's slightest wish, but your presence is no longer requisite; you will therefore be pleased to rid me of it."

The duke, resuming his air of mock humility, bowed low, and departed.

When I was alone, I must confess a few tears escaped me, but I soon wiped them away; my resolution was taken.

The duchesse d'Aiguillon and my female friends hastened to question me relative to the duke's visit. I showed them the *lettre de cachet*, which confirmed the misfortune they had suspected from seeing Hamond, who was to be my escort, waiting in the anteroom to conduct me to the abbey of *Pont aux Dames*, near Meaux, the place of my exile. They all evinced the utmost sorrow, and both Chon and my niece protested that with the king's permission, they would willingly attend me in my seclusion. I felt grateful for this mark of attachment; then sending for the exempt, I inquired whether I might be allowed sufficient time to write a letter, and cause a few necessary preparations to be made? "Madam," replied he, "my only orders are to accompany you to *Pont aux Dames*, the hour of departure is left to yourself."

I then penned a few hasty lines to the king, indicative of my wishes for the happiness and prosperity of his reign, of my ready obedience to his commands, and of my earnest wishes that my sister-in-law and niece might be permitted to visit me. This letter I was promised should be punctually delivered. I had now the painful duty to perform of choosing between Henriette and Geneviève, as only one attendant was allowed me at *Pont aux Dames*. Henriette pleaded her claim as my servant, while the excellent Geneviève timidly urged her early friendship.

« Let chance decide it," cried I. They drew lots, and Geneviève was selected.

We reached *Pont aux Dames* in the middle of the night; it was a miserable looking place, which took its date from the time of Saint Louis or Charlemagne for ought I know. What a contrast met my eyes between this ruinous old building, its bare walls, wooden seats, and gloomy casements, and the splendor of Versailles or Choisy; all my firmness forsook me, I threw myself weeping into the arms of Geneviève.

A courier had announced my intended arrival, and I found all the good sisters impatient to see me. What eager curiosity did the pious nuns evince to behold one of whom they had heard so much even in their quiet retreat, and how many questions had I to reply to from those who had the courage to address me. Alas! I, of all the throng assembled, was the most anxious for quiet and solitude.

I was lodged in the best apartments, which, however magnificent the good people of *Pont aux Dames* might consider them, were not on a par with the granaries of Lucienne. But complaint was useless, and I could only resign myself to what was offered me.

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